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My First Love and My Last Love

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL

AUTHOR OF "PRINCESS SUNSHINE," "A STRUGGLE FOR FAME," ETC.

Authorized Edition

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MY FIRST LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

OUR FIRST MEETING.

I AM sitting alone in my chambers, holding in my hand a miniature. It is the likeness of a child—My First Love.

Above the mantelpiece hangs an oil painting. It is the portrait of a woman—My Last Love.

The whole of my life—my real life, I mean, not that which I lead when I am talking in court with my gown and wig on—or when I am at home with my children, now grown up about me, and my wife, still a handsome woman, embroidering a pair of slippers, which can only be intended for wear in the next world, since there seems no reasonable probability of their being ever finished in this—not my life as it appears when I am telling my best after-dinner stories, or poring over the briefs which now,

quicker than I want them, are sent to me by complaisant solicitors—not my outward and visible life that I pass amongst my fellows, but the real existence I spend with myself and my memory—has been influenced, coloured, shaded, by these two faces. Not more utterly were the ivory and the canvas changed by the painter's brush tracing the portraits of child and woman on them, than has my life been made what it is by the first love, and the last love which these likenesses recal.

Recal! I have written and will not cancel the word; but oh! friends, the memory of all I hoped, of all I possessed, of all I lost, of all I suffered, is never so far away from me as to need any extraneous circumstances, any efforts of mind, to bring back to remembrance.

At any moment, whether I am amongst my fellows, or alone with my papers and books, I can whisper in the ear of that long ago time. It has never died to me. In my musty chambers a fragrance of the primroses and the violets that studded bank and copse in those blissful spring days, is wafted to me. Amid the roar of the London traffic I hear like a still small voice the murmur of the river, the gentle rustling of the wind amongst the topmost branches of the trees. When my blinds are down and my lamp lighted, I can see the field paths untrodden for a quarter of a century—the church in the distance—the children gathering wild flowers, aye, the very brambles growing by the wayside.

Sometimes in my dreams the burden of years

drops off, and with no knowledge as to what the future might hold for me, I wander through the woods hand-in-hand with one who loved to look for the blue bonnets' nest in the quick-set hedge, to gather the earliest apple pie and meadow sweet that grew so abundantly beside the little stream where once we beheld a kingfisher who was wont to make for herself parasols, and swords, and butterfly cages, out of the rushes which thrive in the piece of moor-land that stretched between our cottage and the old mill.

I feel the sunshine dazzling my eyes, and the warm touch of the little fingers thrust into mine. I look down and I see the child with her fair hair, and her white skin, and her clear guileless blue eyes. There is a sound of running water—a twittering of birds amongst the trees—and then I wake to find what was once the reality of my existence, is now its romance—that like the days of my youth, the love of my youth is mine no more, and that though I were to revisit those scenes where I passed all the happiest part of my life, I could never look upon them with the same eyes again as I did in the years the events of which seem all to be enacting over again as I sit, as I have said, on this Christmas Eve, looking at the miniature of a child—My First Love.

Oh, dear love, how well I remember that scorching Midsummer's-day when we became acquainted; and as I recollect that your eyes were full of tears caused by the childish trouble out of which I tried to help, my own brim over at the thought that the

last time we met you were weeping—for very gratitude and thankfulness you said, darling—but your cheeks were pale and worn, love, by reason of the sorrow which had preceded that relief.

It all comes back to me not as a memory, but as a presence—there winds the country lane shaded by trees—I am approaching the bridge that spans the stream where such fine trout, all speckled and glistening, hide themselves beneath the stones, or dart after the insects which settle for an instant on the water. The parapet of the bridge is low on the one side, and I can see the soft rich country landscape steeped in the summer sunshine with the river—so low that one could almost cross it dryshod, for the bed is full of gravel and flint rocks, and large stones washed down by the winter's floods—trickling leisurely on its way. The wall on the other side is higher, and so covered with ivy, which has been trained to form a hedge on the top, that I cannot obtain even a peep into the grounds it conceals; but when I have nearly crossed the bridge, I hear a sudden cry, followed by bitter sobs, and a scream in a stronger voice for help.

"Hillo!" I shouted, in reply.

"Oh! come—oh! please, please, do!" and thus entreated, I jumped over the low fence on the other side of the bridge, ran over the sloping green field to the water's edge, and was picking my steps under the arch as best I could, when two children called out simultaneously with breathless anxiety,

"There—there—stop it."

The "it," was a bag—reticule is, I believe, the more correct term—floating past on a little current it had managed to get into. Where I was standing, the water scarcely seemed to ripple, but on the other side of the arch the stream really flowed rapidly, and before I could even strive to seize the bag, it was beyond my reach. For full five minutes I pursued that thing which seemed almost endued with life, so persistently did it elude all my attempts to capture it; but at length, when it caught in a bramble, the long straggling branches of which dipped into the stream, I succeeded in recovering the lost treasure.

It was hardly worth the wetting I got, or, at least, I thought so, as I looked at the dripping morsel of finery. It was knitted with fine blue purse silk, lined with white satin, and trimmed with blue cord and tassels, and the reader may consequently imagine what an effect the water had produced upon it. Reticules were the fashion in those days—if tight dresses remain in, the impossibility of pockets will bring them into fashion again before another Christmas comes round, and the wonderful pouches which my wife occasionally exhibits—declaring they belonged to her great grandmother—heaven forgive her the implication—will come in for the girls who may be induced to use them, if only to prove they had a great grandmother.

Whether or not, however, the partner of my joys can recollect reticules being commonly carried, my age and memory enable me to do so, and as I held

the dripping article at arms' length, and watched the April shower it flung on the stream, I knew it would never be fit to show its face in polite society again.

However, that was not my fault. I had done everything possible, and got very wet into the bargain, and I did not expect any further demands to be made upon my gallantry, when suddenly Joan—my sister—one of the children who had been making such an outcry, exclaimed,

"And now, Tom, how are we to dry it?"

I had reached the pair by this time—they were standing on a little promontory of gravel that stretched out into the stream—and looking down what seemed to me an immense distance—for I was tall of my age, and she but a wee bit of a thing—I saw for the first time Rose Surry, who, stretching out both her little hands for the bag, said, with her eyes full of tears, and her poor little heart still beating like that of a frightened bird—"Oh, sir, thank you very very much!"

To Joan, I was only her big brother back from school for the holidays, but to this child I was a stranger, and something like a man, and her manner had that charming hesitancy and shyness about it, which to me is just as delicious in a child as in a woman, and which seems doubly delicious now-a-days when neither women nor children are either hesitating or shy.

A fragile little creature, dressed all in white—she wore a soft white sun-bonnet, and a white muslin

pelerine trimmed with lace, she had light cashmere boots, the toes of which were tipped with still lighter coloured leather, and she looked altogether as though she were just turned out of some dainty box lined with silver and tissue paper. Not a speck, not a soil on boots or dress.

Dolly, robed in state, and kept from contact with ordinary humanity, was never more immaculate than the little lady who thanked me with so innocent a grace, and looked at the drenched reticule so pitifully.

"How are we to dry it, Tom?" my sister repeated, and as she spoke I looked at her.

Now people said Joan Luttrell was pretty, and the making of a handsome girl; but for my part I must say she never in those days struck me as being other than a dark-haired, dark-eyed, gipsy-looking hoyden. She was not more than twelve years of age, yet she could fish, she could shoot, she could rob an orchard (ours), she could ride our youngest colt bare-backed, she could walk across the race, which supplied our mill, over a plank turned up on edge, she could climb trees, she could play marbles, she could eat more apples than all my brothers put together, and she was, in short, to quote the opinion of an old Scotchman in my father's employ, "The biggest deevil ever ran."

It was upon this, the eldest daughter of an impoverished race, I looked after feasting my eyes upon the spotless little maiden with the golden hair.

There were nine of us—nine of us to be fed and clothed—so it may readily be imagined that Joan's dress in no respect resembled that of Miss Surry. Joan wore an old silk skirt, which I well remembered as an ancient follower of our family. She had on, likewise, a black satin spencer, a sun-bonnet, made out of some cheap coloured print, and shoes fastened by a strap round the ancle. To say that Joan's personal appearance would have been improved by a thorough good wash, conveys but a small idea of her state. A gold-digger labouring in a perfectly fresh claim would have looked bright as silver by comparison with my sister. You could have tracked every mile of country she had been through by the different sorts of mud she wore upon her dress, like trophies. As usual, her hands were gloveless—also, as usual, her bonnet was a shapeless mass of calico—further, as usual, perfectly unconscious of, and careless concerning her own shortcomings, whilst fully alive to the perplexities of others, she asked, for the third time—

"How can we dry it, Tom?"

"We had better hang it on a branch in the sun," I answered.

"That will not be half quick enough," Joan declared. "Can't we light a fire?"

"By the time we had done that the bag would be dry," I replied—"besides, I have no matches."

"I could soon run home and get a few," Joan suggested.

"Could you not take the bag at the same time?"

I suggested—"Peggy would dry it before the kitchen fire."

"Well thought of, Tom," Joan cried, clapping her sun-burnt hands like a schoolboy. "Give me the bag, and you stay with Rosie."

But at this point Rosie interfered—Joan must not go—the bag could be hung up and dried in the sun—she was afraid to let it out of her sight again —"If mamma knew, she would be so angry—so angry," and the poor little face began to work, and the lips to quiver, and the blue eyes to fill, and she clung to Joan as if there were safety and protection in the presence of her desirable-looking playfellow.

"Shall I take it home?" I asked.

Considering I was but a lad, though a tall one, and that Rose Surry was only a little child, the reader will, I am sure, consider the offer to carry a dripping bag magnanimous. But even this my new acquaintance declined—rather, she took my hand, shyly, it is true, but still confidingly, and asked me also to remain.

Through the years, my darling, I am glad to think I did. It seems like yesterday that I was hanging the bag to the branch of an alder tree, and spreading the handkerchief it contained on the grass by the river side, with a stone at each corner, to prevent the light summer wind carrying it away. As I cross the stream, in order to reach the alder, I see the trout darting under the overhanging bank, where brambles, and grass, and weeds, dipped into the

water. There is a quiet stillness and silence all around; the cattle are lying in a newly-mown meadow, chewing the cud; in the further fields the haymakers are resting from their labour, and lying with their straw hats over their faces, or drinking beer under the shade of the hedgerows.

For ourselves, we find a cool place near the bridge, and sit down on the bank, with our feet resting on the gravel below. Joan has the bulk of the conversation to herself, and talks of many things, with the air of a professional—more especially, she enlarges upon the merits of some tame rabbits who have the misfortune to call her mistress, and descants on the exquisite beauty of a pair of bantams in a manner which makes Miss Surry open her eyes with eagerness and delight.

Further, Joan speaks at length about the perfections of a swing, out of which she has, to my certain knowledge, nearly broken her neck on no less than four occasions since my return home, and finally she produces a handful of cherries, that I well know could only have been procured at the risk of life and limb, and, dividing them into three portions, presents Rose with the "one over," and tells her not to let them touch her white dress.

After this we sit in silence for a time, solemnly devouring the spoil. I think about how soon my holidays will be ended, and fall into a reverie concerning some words my father let drop that very morning. Rose's mind, I fancy, is wandering off to her bag; and as for Joan, her brain is plotting how

she can safely procure a fresh supply of cherries, while she chucks the stones into the stream, and tries vainly to hit a bird perched amongst the ivy, who regards her missiles and her endeavours with the coolest indifference.

Oh! happy noontide! Oh! happy past! Oh! river rippling idly by—how is it ye may never, for ever more, bear to me any treasures save those of memory? Oh! banks, woods, and hedgerows, gay with flower and blossom for the children, who with shouts and laughter, pluck your roses and gather your May, I could weep to think that never a spring nor summer may come upon the earth that shall bring to me aught save the withered garlands of a long ago past—faded leaves of the blue forget-me-not, that have been pressed in the innermost recesses of my heart, till my life has received their colour and their form, and can take no other imprint.

Amongst the stones the water trickled slowly on its way—in the distant fields the haymakers arose and resumed their toil and their labour until the evening—bright butterflies darted across the river, and great bees broke with their hum the silence of that summer's day—and Joan, having finished her cherries, picked her way across the stream, and reported that the bag was "dry as a bone."

"I can't get it down, Tom," she shouted; "come—I am not tall enough to reach the branch—I can only just touch the bag."

Thus exhorted, I rose, and, as I did so, turned.

"Who is this lady, Rose?" I asked.

Immediately Rose jumped up all in a tremble.

"It's mamma—oh! it's mamma," the poor child said, with such an unconscious dread in her tone, that my heart ached for her; but she did not begin to cry; she turned a little pale, yet stood her ground more bravely than from what I had seen of her I should have expected.

"Rose, what are you doing there?" asked the lady, when she was within about half-a-dozen yards of us.

But Rose neither answered nor moved a step; and still the lady came on. I can see her now—a fine, handsome, magnificently-formed woman, dressed in a light-grey silk dress, with a black velvet scarf round her shoulders, and a straw bonnet, with wild roses outside, and lace and roses at each side of her face.

Looking at the scrap of net, and the beech leaf, and the tiny bow of ribbon, which constitutes the typical "bonnet of the period," wherein my wife at this moment makes her appearance, in order to request from me ten pounds, it really seems like romance, to think that "such things were," but handsome women looked well, and will look well in the head gear of all times, and to me, then unaccustomed to such wild luxury in attire, the approaching vision seemed something very beautiful and very terrible. Like Rose, I stood my ground, but I doubt whether Rose felt more afraid than I when the lady's glance fell upon me.

"How often, Rose, am I to tell you that I will not allow you to wander off in this way. Now never let me have to speak to you again about it."

"But nurse was busy, mamma, and I was *so* tired."

"Then you will have to learn not to be tired," was the quick retort. "What would your papa say if he knew I had found you here, sitting by the river with all sorts of people. You are, perhaps, not aware, sir," she added, turning to me, and uttering the "sir" with cutting sarcasm, "that you are at present on Sir Humphry Surry's grounds, and trespassing."

"Oh! mamma!" Rose interrupted before I could frame a reply, "I dropped my bag—your bag I mean—into the river, and it floated away—away—and he brought it back for me and got so wet. He was crossing the bridge when I was swinging it about, and it flew out of my hand I do not know how."

With the most perfect patience Lady Surry listened to this explanation, and at its close she turned to me and said—

"It appears then I have to thank you, and apologize for my remark; but, as you are young, I venture to tell you that a service rendered, always seems the more valuable when it is not encroached upon afterwards."

I could not answer a word. I felt choking with rage and vexation, so without uttering a reply of any kind, I crossed the stream and unfastened the

reticule, and having placed the handkerchief which Joan brought me within it, returned to the spot where Lady Surry stood watching my movements.

"Thank you," she said as she took the bag, and I know her tone would have been more civil to any one of the haymakers than it was to me. "And this young lady," if I could only convey the slightest idea of Lady Surry's look as she spoke those two words, the reader would better understand my feelings, "and this young lady, did she aid in the recovery of my reticule also?"

"No," Joan answered defiantly, "I was over there," indicating the field on the opposite side of the river, "and I saw her," pointing to Rose, "and I came across."

"Perhaps you will have the kindness never to come across again," suggested Lady Surry.

"You may be very sure I never will," Joan retorted with flashing eyes, and although I thought her speech rude, I must say I admired her courage.

"Good-bye," she went on, and she put out her brown hand towards Rose just as a man might have done.

It is wonderful what timid creatures will do on occasions. Though Lady Surry was standing there stern and terrible, Rose buried her little face in Joan's battered sun-bonnet and kissed Joan's mouth, which was stained with cherry juice.

Seeing this, Lady Surry took her daughter's arm and bade her sharply, "Come away," but Rose was not to be frightened out of her politeness.

"Good-bye, sir, and thank you," she said, giving me her disengaged hand, the left.

Next instant the little fingers were jerked out of my clasp, and with a haughty inclination Lady Surry swept off, dragging her daughter after her.

We watched them as they went, and could see that she was scolding Rose, and occasionally giving the arm she held that impatient shake which always indicates anger and temper; but we could also see Rose once half turn back towards us, and wave her left hand.

Then they disappeared into the plantation, and Joan, drawing a long breath, said—

"Isn't she a devil, Tom?"

"My dear Joan," I exclaimed, shocked, "where have you heard anything like that?"

"I heard papa say it," she answered quite calmly. "He said Lady Surry was a devil—there now, Master Tom."

I had no reason to doubt the correctness of Joan's assertion, my father was often given to the use of language not strictly clerical—as he himself remarked, he sometimes spoke in French—and I was therefore obliged to content myself with saying to Joan, that expressions which it was quite right for my father to employ were not suitable for her.

After that we crossed the stream, and went over the fields home together.

CHAPTER II.

ROSE'S PARENTS.

WHEN Sir Geoffry Surry lay a-dying, the only temporal question which troubled him was that without his consent and against his will, a fool who had married a rogue should succeed to the title

Let a man be never so strict a conservative—and Sir Geoffry was conservative to the back bone—there is still enough of the original Adam left in him to induce radical tendencies on occasion. When an eldest son appears to be posting off to Pluto, or the next heir deals too freely in *post obits*, original sin crops up in the breast of our prime old English gentleman, and he wishes, spite of the laws of primogeniture and entail, that he could cut off the offender with a shilling, and reward, it may be, some prudent sneak with the title, and broad lands, and benefits thereto appertaining, and rents therefrom accruing.

Now Sir Geoffry was a conservative, but he was

also human, therefore, when he found that he had no direct heirs, and that Humphrey Surry must *nolens volens* succeed to the baronetage, he cursed his day—made his will—and in due time—which to Humphrey seemed a long time—died.

After the funeral Sir Geoffry's will was read, and then the new baronet discovered that nothing his uncle could keep from him was left for his need. Old Court and say a paltry fifteen hundred a year went with the title, but Grayborough Castle and all the broad acres surrounding it, together with about six or seven thousand per annum, were bequeathed to my dearly beloved brother Gilbert, "who will, I trust, in God's good time succeed to the title."

To Sir Humphrey this proved a blow, but to Matilda whom he had married, it was worse than a blow. In the visions of night she had beheld the towers of Grayborough—the deer on the lawn had been very pleasant possessions to her. It never once entered into her mind that Sir Geoffry, though he hated her, could visit that hatred on his next of kin—for Humphrey, a gentleman every inch, had refrained from informing her of the result of his only visit to his childless uncle.

"You are the first of our race," said the baronet, "who have brought a low-born woman amongst our mothers, wives, and daughters. As you have made your bed so you must lie on it. If love be worth anything it will compensate you for the loss of family ties."

And then Humphrey Surry turned away, sick at

heart, because he knew that it was not for love of him, but for love of his belongings, for love of what he might eventually give her, that Matilda Berners had married him.

But as I have before said, he was a gentleman, and he kept his own counsel. He had made a mistake, as many a better man has done since, and there was no use in crying over spilt milk. Lady Surry was Lady Surry, and not all the wills in Christendom could mend the fact: so Sir Humphrey accepted his position, as well as the other fact that he was never likely to have any heir to come after him.

These things do happen so now and then amongst the upper ten thousand—possibly they happen just the same in the lower ten millions, but that property being an unknown quantity amongst the undistinguished many, no one cares to work out the difficult algebraic problem. Humphrey Surry's wife bore him five sons running—five—no less, to the intense disgust of childless Sir Geoffry—for Gilbert had only one—a tall undeveloped stripling, at the time of his kinsman's death.

But the five died one after another, and then, after an interval, there was hope of an heir again. When the child came it was a daughter, and gossip said, Humphrey's wife turned her face to the wall and wept. The same year Sir Geoffry died. Six years afterwards, Sir Humphrey, having either paid or arranged his debts, came to Old Court with never an

heir to inherit the title—but with Lady Surry, whom he had married once for love.

It came about in this wise: Hunting one day near Grayborough, Humphrey was thrown and badly injured. Kind but not farsighted friends carried him to the abode of J. S. Berners, M.R.C.S., who saw to his hurts, and who had a handsome daughter. From the day he was borne across his threshold the fair Matilda marked him for her own, the spoil of her bow and of her spear.

She was engaged at the time—for such women do not lack lovers, more is the pity—to a certain Robert Childutt, who farmed a couple of hundred freehold acres, and had altogether been looked upon by the Berners family as rather a desirable catch for Tilly. But Tilly was above any low considerations, and regarded the obligations of a promise no more, or indeed, rather less than she regarded the necessity of curling her hair.

She knew she was handsome, her glass told her that, even had Mr. Childutt in his folly failed to do so; and there, in her father's first floor back bedroom lay a gentleman, heir to a baronetage, lacking a wife. Should this thing be suffered in Israel? Should she permit him to go away heart-whole? Assuredly not; and accordingly, as she, to quote Sir Geoffry, was a rogue and Humphrey a fool, they made a match of it, and had many children, amongst whom Rose was the only one who lived.

To state that her mother disliked Rose, would

be to convey too mild an idea of her feelings. She hated her.

"Had I only known," Mrs. Surry was overheard to say, "I would have managed accordingly, and had a boy." But at the time she never dreamed of a girl's advent, and Rose's coming was as unlooked for as unwelcome.

Not to her father, however—he did not so much mind whether his boy, or Gilbert's, succeeded to the title. Long years of matrimony had done their work, and Humphrey Surry was happily indifferent as to who or what came after him.

He had played his game, and failed—for him life was over. If only his wife would have left him and Rosy alone!—well, every existence has its "if only," and Sir Humphrey did not care greatly. He was a fool, as his uncle had broadly stated, and Providence is very good to fools. Out of the abysses of their own folly comfort comes to them—out of Sir Humphrey's abyss there came Rose.

When his wife was dissatisfied, and creditors pressing, Sir Humphrey found a certain pleasure in the sight of his daughter's face—in the clasp of her childish arms. It is a poor life that in which a man disappointed of the chief blessing life can offer—a woman's devotion—a woman's sympathy—turns to the affection of the children, who ought merely to serve as a tie binding husband and wife closer together.

For me—there will be hundreds, thousands of people, this Christmas time, to say I am a heathen

for advancing the opinion—though my opinion is, God knows, the truth—whenever I see a man disappointed in his marital relations taking comfort out of his children, and seeking his companionship with them, I always think of a lonely woman I broke in upon one morning unexpectedly, and found nursing a cat, all the time that her eyes —Lord comfort her!—were fixed upon the fire—seeing, it might be, therein the ghost of a dream never realized, of a hope never fulfilled.

After all, there is nothing but a woman can fill a man's heart.

I know that—I who, now surrounded by wife and children, sit beside my Christmas hearth with mine empty.

My love—yes—you are my wife, and, according to your light, have done your duty, and were you to die to-morrow, I should be very, very sorry, and never marry again—but you have never filled the vacant corner, for all that—never cured the dull, aching pain, through the years which have come and gone.

My dears, kiss me! you are my children—but you are not hers.

If you had, you might have been different, and I too. Don't marry in a hurry, and don't marry excepting for love.

It is not bad Christmas advice this, friends. When you are kissing under the mistletoe, young folks, remember what I have told you. When you see young Corydon, Paterfamilias, decoying your

Phillis under the Druidical branch, be not overswift to advance the claims of that highly respectable other individual, whose suit you approve—but rather leave the young folks alone, and if Corydon have no grievous sin bearing witness against him, can show that he is able and willing to work for the support of his wife, in God's name let them marry.

As the Pharisees in olden times were rebuked because they rejoiced at not being as that Publican, so I always doubt the woman who blesses the fate that represents to her shortsightedness the Maker of the universe, which interposed to prevent her mating with Frank, the ne'er do well—with Harry, the black sheep.

She is fat, and unsentimental, this matron whom I remember, full of romance, and with a waist I could have spanned; she has daughters she will marry to the highest bidder, and sons she would taboo if they made love where there was no prospect of settlements. But oh! friends, all holy, wholesome, unworldly love is now sour grapes to her—and it is but her feminine instinct which prompts her to make the best of the mistake, and to perpetuate the error.

Evil, be thou my good! Mammon, be thou my God! cry these women, who have gone from Dan to Beersheba, and found all barren; and the cry is echoed by those who, seeing them outwardly prosperous, and apparently happy, behold the rind of

the Dead Sea apples, and know nothing of the dust and the ashes, the decay and the rottenness, lurking within. After which not digression, but statement, of opinion, I may return to my story, and tell it.

CHAPTER III.

OUR VISITOR.

THE courteous and patient reader must not suppose that I learned all the facts contained in a previous chapter in a moment. On the contrary, I have concentrated into a few pages the information of years. What we knew best at my father's house in those days was that the residents at Old Court were, for their station, very poor—that Rose's nurse had likewise to officiate as Lady Surry's maid—that indoors they could afford in the way of male servants only a butler, whilst as regarded the stables, coachman and groom—the latter turned occasionally into a footman—were the only retainers employed.

Sir Humphrey had no other country seats, and therefore when he went to shoot, was compelled to do so at the instance of kindly friends. He sat in the House ; but when he went to town was obliged either to go without Lady Surry, or else to stay at the residence of a widowed sister, who was willing to put up with the inconvenience of having them,

for the sake of the Bart. and M.P. attached to his name. Lady Surry flattered the old lady's vanity. She did not snub the pug dogs in Devonshire Place as she was wont to do her only child Rose, whom she left at Old Court, in charge of an individual half housekeeper, half cook. Lady Surry was still young enough, and personable enough, to flirt, and she did flirt, though unbeknown to Miss Surry—only, unhappily, nothing came of it. She failed to leave Sir Humphrey free, and Sir Humphrey still regarded her with consideration, if not with love, as "my young wife," though Lady Surry was nine-and-thirty, if she were a day, having been nearly twenty-three when she made her matrimonial venture—and won.

But all this time I am wandering from my tale. It was a lovely summer's evening when, just as we were about commencing tea, Joan entered our sitting-room leading by the hand Rose Surry.

We were not wealthy people, as has been already intimated, so we lived plainly, dining all together at one o'clock, and assembling again round the tea-table at six—therefore we must have seemed quite a party to the child, who drew back a little, and would have retreated altogether had Joan not dragged her forward.

"It is Rose Surry," commenced my sister, "I brought her in to tea, mamma."

"But, my dear, you know Lady Surry——" our mother was beginning, when a look at the poor little tender face cut her short. "Will you sit beside me,

love?" she went on, all her maternal instincts astir at sight of the child's clinging gentleness: "Joan, take off her bonnet." Which Joan did, like a matron of forty, finishing up the performance with a kiss, and the remark, "There, my queen."

I never beheld anything like Joan's love for that child. She waited upon her like a slave, and would have given Rose her own portion of jam, as well as that my mother heaped on the stranger's bread, only Rose said she could not eat it.

And indeed the child ate very little, but after the first few minutes seemed, in her quiet way, to be supremely happy amongst us all. She took especially to my father, sitting on his knee and pulling his grey moustache, and laughing merrily when he told her she was a saucy little puss, and said she did not know her own name.

"Rose, indeed—Lily, you mean," persisted my father.

"Mamma calls me Rose, and papa Posie, and nurse Plague," she explained gravely.

"And why Plague?" asked my mother; and at this question the child lifted her large soft eyes and looked at my mother earnestly, but answered never a word.

"Why Plague, darling?" repeated my mother, and she stooped down her head to hear the reply.

Then Rose stretched up her little arms and clasped them round my mother's neck, while she whispered, "Because she never has time to take me out, and I

go by myself, and then when she finds me she says I am the plague of her life."

"But don't you think you are naughty to go by yourself, and make nurse unhappy?" asked my father.

"No," she answered. "I have no one to play with, and nothing to do; and then, if I can get to the river sometimes I see Joan."

"Did you see Joan at the river this evening?" my mother enquired—for she had heard the episode of Lady Surry's reticule, and was prepared to rebuke Joan if she found that young lady had been breaking rules, and trespassing on Sir Humphrey's property.

"Yes," Joan broke in at this juncture. "I was on one side of the bridge, and saw Rosie on the other, and called to her, and she came. Her mamma is in Wales, and she had been there all the afternoon by herself, so I brought her home. You won't catch me going into their place again," and Joan's voice was uplifted, and Joan's eyes sparkled, and my dear mother said—

"You must not speak in such a tone," and my father exclaimed "Hush, hush, hush!"

After that the conversation languished, and it was proposed we should all go into the garden, where Rose, holding my hand partook of some gooseberries which Joan gathered, and subsequently recounted for my benefit a fairy tale, considering evidently that she was bound in courtesy to amuse and instruct me.

We stood in fairy land then, sweetest, though neither of us knew it—in the bright, innocent, happy, fairy land of youth and inexperience.

"Where did that all happen, Rose?" I asked when she had done.

"I do not know," she answered, "but ever so far away from here."

My love, there came a day when I reminded you of that fairy-tale, and asked you the same question again, and you replied, darling—"It all happened in this garden, Tom, and the prince and princess are you and me."

"We did not know anything about love in those days, Rose," I whispered.

"Ah! Tom, we were children then," you said, and God help us, we were little better than children in our happiness when you uttered that profound remark—nothing more, love—wandering along the grass paths, which were damp, I remember, and covered (it was in the early spring time) with blossoms from the apple-trees.

It was moonlight, and we thought such a moon had never sailed through the sky before. For my own part, I have not seen such a night since, and believe it is a different sky and a different moon from that we beheld standing in my father's garden I look up at as I pace back from my chambers to the domestic hearth where all my earthly happiness is now centred.

Supposing, however, a man have once lived in fairy land, he cannot, even though he be the happy

husband of an estimable wife, and the proud father of handsome children, always refrain from dreaming dreams and seeing visions. In the midst of the prosaic city, before his mental sight there flits ever and anon the "rath" where the "little people" dwelt the green ring where they danced in the summer nights. Recollection is always summer to some friends. To those who have spent a happy youth the roses of the past bloom perennially—there is always a perfume of mignonette and pinks, always broad patches of sunshine lying athwart the landscape, always a glitter on the sea, leaves on the trees, the songs of birds in the air, fruits clustering in the orchard.

The past comes back so to me, God be thanked. Though the autumnal breezes blew, and the frosts and sorrows of winter came, still my life held bloom and flower once, the memory of which no future can destroy. And even while my eyes fill while writing and thinking of the long ago, it is not with bitter tears, but with drops wrung from the knowledge that although my life might have been less miserable had I never loved and lost, it would have proved less happy too.

After a time my mother came out to spoil Rose's enjoyment.

"They will be anxious about you at Old Court, pet," she said, "and I must now send you home. Tom, you had better take her."

"Let me go too, mamma," Joan cried, but my dear mother negatived that proposal, to my intense

delight—for if I were to run the gauntlet of entering Old Court, and proffering an explanation, I did not want to do so in Joan's company.

Very soon Miss Rose, wrapped up in a warm scarf, was trudging with me down the lane home. Although our places almost adjoined, the entrance gates of Old Court were a good mile from our cottage, and I had not the slightest intention of taking my charge home by any back entrance. She urged me to do so, indeed, adding as an inducement the fact that "mamma was not at home," which speech gave me but a poor idea of Rosie's notions on the score of morality; whereupon I considered it my duty to give her a lecture concerning the sinfulness of doing behind a person's back what she would not do before her face—in the middle whereof Rose began to whimper, and I to fear I had produced too strong an impression.

"What is it, dear?" I asked, for I had not meant to be cross with her, only from the height of my teens to preach to her inexperience.

"I am tired," she said in reply, "so tired! Is it very far home now, please?"

"Shall I carry you?" I proposed.

"Yes, please," and the little arms were upstretched, and I took the light burden in mine, and so carried her all the remainder of the way to her father's house. She did not go to sleep; she just lay there quietly, looking up at the sky, with her bonnet fallen back, and her soft golden hair stirred by the evening breeze.

"Do I tire you?" she asked once; "do your arms ache?"

"With carrying you!" I said; "why you are light as a feather, I could carry you from here to London."

"I wish you would, then," she answered, "I want to see the King and Queen sitting with crowns on their heads and fur on their shoulders—mustn't they be grand!"

"I am going to London after a time," I said a little proudly, because in those days it was something to visit the metropolis. But immediately I had spoken my heart sank, for that very day it had come to me that I ought not to go; and I was even then making up my mind to do what my father wished, at any personal cost, at any personal sacrifice.

And what he asked was just my future, just that and nothing more. Perhaps it would have been better had he taken it then altogether, and done therewith what he listed.

"Is Joan going too?" Rose asked; whereupon I, being rather in a pedantic frame of mind, undertook to prove to her that it was only men who went from home, and not little girls, or indeed girls at all (were I talking to Rose now on this point, I wonder what I should have to tell her), and I enlarged upon this theme, until probably Rose wearying of it, told me I was not a man, but a boy.

After that, thinking her a trifle rude, and considering that the greater the truth the greater the

libel, I remained silent, till she brought me back to a better state of mind, by saying—

"You are not cross, Tom, are you?"

"Cross, Rosie! no," I answered; and then she nestled her soft face up against mine, and the shade of Sir Humphrey's trees closed over us as I carried her up the avenue home.

We had not been long in making acquaintance. Already I was Tom to the child; already she was as much a part of my life as Joan, or Cecil, or Harry, or Ethel, or any of the other progeny residing in our unpretentious house. Whatever I might do in the future, wherever I might go, I could never forget blue eyes and golden hair, who lay in my arms with hands clasped round my neck, whispering, "I love you, Tom." Oh! my darling.

I had never been to Old Court before, and the shadow which seemed to have flitted thither with me deepened in intensity as we drew near Rosie's home. What I was to say, how explain my advent, I could not imagine, and we had already reached the front door before any suitable form of address presented itself.

Then, while I was waiting for some one to come in answer to my knock, I framed this sentence—

"Miss Surry came home with my sister to tea, and thinking the family might be uneasy, I have brought her back."

But the "best laid plans o' mice and men" fall through sometimes, and my sentence fell through

by reason of Rose exclaiming the moment a solemn elderly butler opened the door—

"It is only me, Hoskins," (the darling's acquaintance with Lindley Murray was at that time imperfect). "I have been up with Mr. Luttrell's papa and mamma, and I do not want any tea, please —I have had my tea. Put me down on the table, please, Tom"—this last clause to me.

I crossed the dark old-fashioned hall, and set my maiden on a substantial oak table, where she curled up her legs, and at once assumed airs of command that I could not have believed she had courage to indulge in.

"Where's nurse, Hoskins?" asked Missy, nursing her pretty boots.

"Crying about you, Miss," answered the butler; "she has sent Carnett to look for you, thinking you were lost."

"Lost!" repeated the autocrat, contemptuously, "why how could I be lost, Hoskins? I must always be somewhere."

"Which you must, Miss," argued Hoskins.

"I am going now," I broke in at this juncture; "will you bid me good night?" I said this very humbly, for the house and the man servant, who, I fancied, looked as if he knew something greatly to my disadvantage, had proved too much for my equanimity. There was a gulf placed between us and these people who owned Rose, and no one save Joan—Joan, in her mad disregard of consequences, —would have tried to cross it.

"Good night, Tom," answered Rose, holding up her mouth to be kissed, but at that moment a side-door flew open, and a woman appeared, who embraced Rose, calling her "duck, and pet, and lamb, and treasure," and asking "where she had dropped from," adding, "poor nursey has been crying her eyes out."

"Why don't you say I am the plague of your life?" asked Rosie, solemnly.

"Because, my sweet lamb, I thought you were really lost this time. I have been out the last two hours looking for you, and now Carnett is gone."

"To walk with Phœbe," finished Rose, with that demure archness which belongs to the sex, when speaking about love affairs, long before they have attained to the knowledge of good and evil.

Once again I essayed to get away, but Rosie held me fast, while she introduced me to her nurse with the words, "*He* brought me home."

"And I am sure, sir, it was very kind of you indeed, and we are all obliged, and where, please, did you find Miss Rose?"

"Find!" repeated Miss Rose; "I never went to any place to be found—Joan took me to her home for tea—that was all."

"My sister is very fond of Miss Surry," I explained, "but she ought not to have tempted her away from home."

"I wish my lady would let Miss Rose have anybody to play with," the nurse answered; "for the child is moped up and lonely here all day by her-

self"—and from this speech I knew that Rosie's guardian, in her mother's absence, would not even try to prevent the pair meeting. And after all, what did it matter whether they did or not, so long as it was Rosie, who, like a stray pheasant, wandered into my father's grounds from Sir Humphrey's plantations?

"You would like to return by the river walk, should you not, sir?" said Hoskins, as I passed through the hall-door. "I will get you the key of the gate leading on to the bridge, and you can send it back any time. That way saves full three quarters of a mile."

But I declined this offer, telling him I should like the walk, and so I passed down under the arching trees that made the avenue dark and lonesome.

It was not too dark and lonesome, however, for Miss Phœbe and Mr. Carnett, whom I met strolling lovingly along together—she with her head almost touching his shoulder, he with his arm passed round her waist.

I should not have thought it necessary to disturb their *tête-à-tête* had Carnett himself not called out to know who I was, and what I was doing there at that time of night.

In reply, I informed him I was returning from the Court, having just taken Miss Surry back there.

"It will be a relief to you to know she is safe, and that you need not trouble yourself to look for her

any longer," I added, whereupon Phœbe giggled, and Mr. Carnett muttered something about having heard at the Lodge that a gentleman had brought her home.

When I got near our own house, my father met me, smoking, as was his wont, a short pipe, cigars being a luxury our means did not permit.

"Well, my boy," he began, after we had walked a few steps together, "will you consider what I said to you this morning—carefully, Tom, remember?"

"I have considered, father," I answered, "and I have decided to stay at home and try and do my best."

He took a whiff or two more before he said, laying his hand on my shoulder,

"God bless you, Tom."

CHAPTER IV.

OUR OWN HOME.

LOOKING back over the past, with eyes that are now sharpened by knowledge of the world, I do not wonder at Lady Surry considering us very common people, who had no right to come between the wind and her nobility.

We were not rich, and although we were of respectable family, there had never, so far as I know, been any member composing it very great or very grand. Of course there had been a time in our annals, as there is usually a time in the annals of those who can talk confidently about a great grandfather, when the Luttrells were well-to-do—when they owned a fair amount of landed property, associated with county gentry, and rode to the meet of the Darfordshire hounds, on their own hacks, and cried "Tally Ho!" from the backs of their own hunters.

They had a pretty, old-fashioned mansion, away in Darfordshire. I have seen it within the last ten

years — surrounded by hideous gardens, laid out principally in the Dutch style—where the flower-beds were bordered by box, and the old yew trees artistically trimmed into the similitude of peacocks, lions, griffins, and other animals.

The property is now in the possession of a very worthy knight, who was at one time Lord Mayor of London, and who made all his money in trade. He has thrown out wings, and added many architectural abominations, but he had the sense to leave the old house overgrown with ivy intact, and he still nourishes the yew trees, and has them trimmed and cut as above described—under the impression, perhaps, that people may think his ancestors planted them.

Not that it matters much who planted them now, or if they had never been planted, for that matter, but they please Sir William, and constituted one great reason why he purchased the place. His yearly income is larger than the entire principal of the Luttrells in their palmiest days, so I have good reason for saying that even in the heyday of their prosperity my people were never anything very particular.

They belonged to the rank-and-file of the upper middle-class. With either wealth or brains, they might have become colonels, generals, commander-in-chiefs in that social army—but they had neither. They had not even sense enough to go into trade, which was, perhaps, so far fortunate, since, with their lack of cleverness, commerce would infallibly

have hurried them even quicker down the hill than they posted of their own accord.

I know a certain Luttrell now, one of the lineal descendants of the Darfordshire family—not a mere offshoot of that race, like myself—who is something in a Government office, and who barely earns enough to keep himself, and a delicate wife, and three sickly-looking children, off the parish.

This man has no money beyond his salary, and never had any—neither had his father before him, neither had his wife, nor his wife's father. His ancestors were no greater folk than I have described them—he has no land—he has no particular position—and he grows nothing but an imbecile moustache, which looks a degree more purposeless than himself. Yet he never fails to tell me on those not rare occasions, when he wants the loan of a five-pound note, that no gentleman should go into business.

"It is only fit for snobs and cads," he declares; and were he not such a poor creature, I should be unable to refrain from telling him, "It is certainly not fit for fools."

For me, I am not in trade; I have never been, but for a very short period of my life. Yet I hold trade to be as necessary to the very existence of a true aristocracy, as food to that of a man. For a pauper aristocracy is in its very nature an anachronism, and I should like to know how, except in trade, or by trade, sufficient money is now-a-days to be obtained to keep blue blood circulating through the

social system. Men cannot go freebooting, or marauding, or looting now, excepting in business, and it is quite a question, I think, whether even a modern "promoter" is not quite as respectable and honest a member of society as a "Reiver" used to be in the good old days when "might was right."

All of which merely brings me to the point I wanted to reach long ago, namely, that had the Lutterells been clever enough to turn their attention to commerce, and amass wealth—without, at the same time, losing all command over their H's — even Lady Surry might have been disposed to make herself agreeable.

But we were poor, and, however novelists and poets may idealize poverty, there is nothing so awfully prosaic as a small income and nine fine children.

People were, indeed, kind enough to hint we were fine children, but that only made the matter worse, for our good health induced large appetites, while the animal spirits of the younger fry were for ever leading them into places where they tore their clothes, and whence they returned home sorry, ragged sights to behold.

In his early days my father had been an officer. It was quite like the Luttrells, to put their sons in positions where they could not possibly live on the pay allotted to them. The Luttrells, and such as they, replenish the earth with curates, ensigns, briefless barristers—who write for the press—civil servants, secretaries, and so forth, and in conformity

with the plan of his family, and their tribe, my father entered the army.

After he married Bertha Harrison, who, of course, had not a sixpence, he sold out, paid his debts, and looked about for employment in London, which he failed to get. Time went by—children came, but money went; and had it not been for the kindness of a widowed aunt, who lived in great splendour in Queen Anne Street, with a maid, a cook, a footman, a housemaid, a butler, a cat, a parrot, a King Charles and an Italian greyhound, there can be no question but that a climax would have arrived sooner than actually proved the case.

But though deferred, the climax came, and, at the earnest invitation of George, by the grace of God my father found himself seated one evening at Mr. Sloman's hospitable board, inditing an epistle first to his aunt, and secondly to a certain Colonel Montgomery, who had always been his great chum, and who, it was whispered, had run an almost neck-and-neck race with him in Bertha Harrison's good graces.

Be this as it may, both Colonel and aunt came to the rescue, and somehow affairs were arranged. After that, however, came the important question as to how he was to live, and Colonel Montgomery offered him the lease of a farm which had just fallen in, near Crommingford, without any fine, which offer being gratefully accepted, Mrs. Graham agreed to lend him one thousand pounds to stock it, and thus en-

abled to begin the world afresh, my father turned his back on London.

He would have done well, I think, at Crommingford, but for two, or, indeed three, drawbacks; the first was, that my mother knew nothing whatever of the duties of her new position, and never could learn them, wherefore the making of the butter, the manufacturing of the cheese, the rearing of the calves, the care of the poultry, was left entirely to servants.

There was no mistress's eye about our establishment to put meat on the horse's ribs—and indeed how could there be? said my poor father once to me, almost apologetically, when she was constantly bringing children into the world?

Which was all very well and very nice of him to recollect; but I know now quite well that if my mother had never had a child, she would have proved just as useless a wife for a struggling farmer as was the case.

The second drawback to my father's prosperity —I will not say happiness, because it would grieve me to think he had been otherwise than happy— were the number of arrows contained in his matrimonial quiver: think of it—there were nine of us, and I but sixteen.

Three, two older and one younger than myself, had died; but there were nine living—nine, and Joan the eldest girl. It was a blessing we lived in the country, and were, so to speak, our own tradespeople, for had we resided in a town, and been com-

pelled to buy bread, and milk, and beef, and beer, it would have taken a fortune to support us. As it was, we fattened and throve, and there was neither sickness within our house, nor scarcity within our gates.

But there was a trouble, which arose in this way, and caused my father many and many a sleepless night and wretched day.

On the farm at Crommingford there were two small flour mills, one that had happily been burnt permitted to fall into ruin, and another that, unfortunately, was in a perfect state of repair.

At the time he took possession of the farm, the latter mill was rented by a man of the name of Telfer, who managed in a small way to make a living out of it. When he died, my father took the mill into his own hands, and worked it not unprofitably. In an evil hour, however, some one suggested to him, or the idea suggested itself, that two mills might be as easily worked as one, and that it was a thousand pities for the water-wheel on the lower pond to be standing still. He had got a little money before him by this time, and so commenced building.

Now everybody knows what commencing building means, namely the commencement of trouble, and so my father found it. An acquaintance had assured him that the place might be put into working order again for an old song; but the song turned out ultimately a most mournful ditty. Further, when the mill was rebuilt, my father discovered that the same rule holds good with regard to busi-

ness as with regard to hens. Say that six hens lay on an average two eggs a week each, any inexperienced person might assume that thirty-six would produce six dozen—but practically this is found to be a fallacy; and in like manner the profits obtained by a man in a large way of business bear no proportion whatever to the amount made by one trading in a smaller and more modest manner.

Moreover the rebuilding and fitting up cost him just double what he had anticipated, and as if to crown his misfortunes within a month of the time when he had, as he thought, made a most desirable arrangement, which would give him time to pay the people to whom he owed money, down came a letter from Mrs. Graham's solicitors, demanding the return of the thousand pounds she had lent him ten years previously.

"That is because we would not let her have Joan," said my mother tearfully, for Mrs. Graham had desired my charming sister as an addition to her olio of oddities.

"I scarcely think so," answered my father, and he wrote to the solicitors, explaining that the interest having been regularly paid, he felt much surprised at their request. He went on to say, that it would put him to grievous inconvenience having to raise so large a sum of money within the time specified, three months; that he was anxious to do what he could in the matter, but trusted, as he was already heavily burdened, that they would agree to take the amount in four yearly instalments of two hun-

dred and fifty pounds each, interest to be paid at the same rate as before, five per cent.

To this in due course he received a most unsatisfactory reply. Mrs. Graham, having been given to understand that he had been spending large sums of money on property which he merely held on lease, did not feel inclined to leave her thousand pounds for which she held no sufficient security, in his hands any. longer She had instructed her solicitors further to remark, that as my parents had not evinced any willingness to meet her wishes in a matter on which she had set her heart, she should certainly not consider their desires now. All of which, being translated, meant that if they still liked to send up Joan to Queen Anne Street, labelled "glass, with care,' she would reconsider her decision, and probably never ask for the thousand pounds again.

It was a temptation, certainly, but my parents did not yield. They had old-fashioned notions, and considered it would be very like selling or abandoning Joan to give her to Mrs. Graham. God had intrusted her to them, and if so long as they lived they neglected that trust, how should they answer to Him for it in the day when He made up his jewels. Further they could not send her from them, duty apart. They loved Joan, and all their children, and, as my mother said to me once when speaking on this matter—

"You must remember, Tom, we had lost three, so we understood what it was—but I knew those

three were safe, and I did not know whether Joan would be safe; that made all the difference."

I am only recounting facts as they happened, and do not propose to pass judgment on them. Possibly my parents were wrong. No doubt it would have been a fine thing for them to have had one child fed, clothed, and educated free of expense, and with the prospect of a good dot in addition; but still, I think if any person, whether old maid or widow, whether "King of France, or, far better, Pope of Rome," were to come and ask me for one of my blessings, I should feel inclined to reply uncivilly.

Nobody, however, ever did want one of my children, and I shrewdly suspect, no one ever wanted their mother but myself—and I did not, though I married her. Some young men, I notice, are now beginning to loom about our house, and I suppose some day the "old story" will be told me by a new narrator. When my girls are "wanted" that way I shall probably not say nay, and I do not think I shall be difficult to satisfy pecuniarily. Nevertheless, I do not envy the future of the happy man who unites with any one of the blessings of my hearth and home, unless he send her first to a school for cookery—second, to one of those ladies who advertize patterns eighteenpence, and instruction given in dress-making. If, further, he can induce her to learn arithmetic, and comprehend that there are only twenty shillings in a pound, and that an income of five hundred a year will not enable people to live

honestly at the rate of a thousand, I think he might go farther and fare worse.

These are, however, a good many ifs to be leapt in the race matrimonial, and perhaps, though I doubt it, he might find another wife who would not require to go through such a course of education as I have indicated.

Excuse me, most courteous reader, these discursive remarks. Although the past is present with me, the present will intrude, and crop up between me and the story I have undertaken to tell. Where was I?—oh, talking about Joan, who remained on at the paternal mansion to become the hoyden I have described, and to make me acquainted with Rose Surry.

For which I shall be for ever grateful to Joan, who is now a great lady, happy in her husband, her children, her position, and herself.

We do not meet very often now, Joan and I, for there are certain memories we still wot of that have never been decently laid out, and shrouded, and coffined, and buried, and forgotten. No—only sometimes, when she is in London, and can spare time from her calls and parties, and other duties (they are duties) incident to her position, she drives over to the Temple in a quiet single-horse brougham, which she leaves in Essex Street, and then walks across Devereux Court, and so to Pump Court, where she will sit with me for an hour, while her coachman, who is of a literary turn of mind, reads *Lloyd's Newspaper*, and sometimes, when he is *quite*

sure no one can see him (but I have done so, crossing from Little Essex Street), indulges in a modest half-pint, nay even adventures on a cigar.

Joan will not visit my wife now, for there was once a deadly war waged between them, and Joan cannot quite forget. But she asks Madam and my daughters to her assemblies, where they have an opportunity of seeing everybody who has ever done anything, and, if they were of a reflective turn of mind, which they are not, of considering how exceedingly like ordinary mortals great folks are.

For me, I do not go to Joan's grand parties, because, for one thing, I do not like parties, and in the next, I do not like her husband; although, mark you, were I in trouble, pecuniary or otherwise, there is not a man on earth to whom I would as soon turn in my distress as to him. And, on the other hand, if sorrow fell on him, I know he would come straight away to my office and say, "Luttrell, you tried to help me once—will you do so again?"

There are different kinds of friendship, and there is one which takes the form of not wanting to see your friend every half hour through the day. That is our form—and if you wish to know why, I will tell you as this story proceeds.

But not just now, because I am going back to the mills and Mrs. Graham.

The latter lady, I shall always believe, thought that my father would never be able to raise the money, and that out of sheer desperation he would give her Joan, to whom she had taken a fancy

when she was staying with us a year previously. She knew Colonel—now General—Montgomery was in India, and like most rich people who live selfish and isolated lives, she forgot that it is just upon the cards a poor man may, in the course of years, meet with some one willing and able to help him at a pinch.

This some one my father knew, and turned to in his distress. He had turned to him for advice over the debts incurred on that wretched mill, and now he went to him for help, which was given.

But my father was an honourable man, and, knowing his friend could not afford to risk the amount he offered him, namely, two thousand pounds, which should enable him to clear off everybody, and start in life again for the third time, he went to a lawyer, in order to enquire what security he could offer that might protect his creditor against loss.

To this the lawyer—honest perhaps, but short-sighted—answered, "Insure your life, and give him a bill of sale." Which was just about equivalent to saying, "Put yourself in a pan of scalding water for the remainder of your life," only, unhappily, my father did not see this. He insisted actually, against his creditor's desire, on giving him a bill of sale over every sheep he owned, horse he had reared, hen he had hatched—over his ricks in the farm yard, and his implements, carts, furniture, dairy-utensils, garden-tools, and so forth. The stock being changeable, would have been of course no earthly

security in the hands of a different individual, but my father looked upon the whole affair as a matter of honour, and if he sold a bullock, replaced it—if he parted with a stack of hay, duly acquainted Mr. Reemes, his friend, with the fact.

But what did not that bill of sale do for us? It destroyed our credit just as completely as if we had been bankrupt—aye more, because a bankrupt does, at all events, re-enter the world a free man (he will happily not be able to do so much longer), and that accursed document kept us bondsmen and bondswomen till the uttermost farthing had been paid.

And to pay with a heavy life-insurance premium added was not easy. Well—God help us—when the end came, which did come, no man could say my father had wronged him of a penny, or that he had lost a shilling by him. Further, he reared us all respectably, and taught us to live honestly and virtuously, and we were happy. Yes, I am grateful to remember that, though I sometimes wish I had been able to contribute more towards that happiness, and better content to live and die "the jolly miller of Dee."

Still time went on—it always does go on—and my father, struggling heavily with his anxieties, greeted me on my return from the school where, after much difficult studying of ways and means, he had placed me—with a welcome cheery and loving as ever.

It was the summer when my story opens, and I

had then been at school two years and a half, studying my best, and making good progress. Not knowing the state of the farming finances, I had desired to become a barrister; and my father, who was proud as well as fond of me, said I should follow the bent of my inclination, and become famous yet.

I fancy my mind must have been much older than my years, for I can remember even then having visions of the great things destiny had in store for me.

There was no height to which in my ambitious dreamings I did not climb. To inexperience the path to success seems always easy. There were no stones, no briars, no lurking disappointment, no pelting showers of opposition and discouragement along the road I mentally travelled. I beheld myself wealthy and renowned, I pictured myself addressing a jury, I heard my own voice uplifted in the House of Commons. I do not think I was more vain or more conceited than most lads who have not yet found their level, but I must have possessed a certain consciousness of my own power to work, and succeed by reason of that power, and I used to wander about the fields during my summer holidays, dreaming my dreams, and building castles in the air too grand for any mortal ever to inhabit.

But by degrees there seemed to fall a mist over these fairy palaces. I could not now tell at what precise hour a cloud appeared first to flit over the surface of my future sky. I felt it was there, rather than beheld it. The air seemed to grow suddenly

chilly. Like the "keld" ruffling the serenity of a Cumberland tarn, there came over me something which caused me to know, dimly it may be, but still surely, that life could never prove to mortal like a fairy tale, wherein the flowers never withered, and sorrow never entered, and the trees remained green all the year—wherein men never grew feeble nor women old.

I do know, however, when the storm first broke —when the magic glass was shivered, and the dear illusion dispelled—namely, on the afternoon of the day when I saw Rose Surry home.

"Tom," said my father, coming to me where I was preparing my tackle for the next morning's fishing—"Tom, I want to speak to you seriously for five minutes. You are old enough now to make a friend of, and I mean to talk to you like a friend, as well as a son, my boy."

"What is it, father?" I asked, anxiously, for the sky seemed suddenly to darken over, and life in a moment to assume a very different aspect indeed. "What is the matter? I will try to be worthy of your trust if you only tell me how to make myself so."

"Stop," he answered, "do not promise till you hear what it all means," and then he went on to repeat what I have already told, with this addition —"My health, Tom, is not what it was, and I have been thinking the matter over seriously. Suppose anything happened to me, what would become of your mother, and brothers, and sisters? If you still

adhere to your intention of becoming a barrister, years and years must pass before you can earn a penny; whereas, if you could only be content to remain at home, you might at a moment's notice step into my shoes, if at any future time the necessity arose, besides being of the greatest assistance to me in the present."

I did not speak—I could not speak. I beheld my dream castle, like a mist wreath, vanishing away. Instead of doing great things for my family, I saw myself plodding on year after year—year after year—a farmer—a miller.

I was young, and the sacrifice seemed great; but I loved my father, and so, after a silence, during the continuance of which my disappointment seemed to be choking me, I said—"I would do whatever he liked."

"No, Tom," he replied, "I will not take that answer. I do not want you to remain at home merely because I tell you to do so. You must think the matter over, and decide for yourself. It is a great deal to give up—but it is also a great deal to be able to accomplish. It shall be just as *you* like, Tom, after you have thought the matter over."

And I did think it over—all the afternoon—all the time Rosie was telling me her fairy tale—all the way I carried her in my arms home to Old Court—all the way back, till I met my father, as has already been related.

It was an awful trial to give up thus, of my

own free will, the hopes and the expectations of my life—to be brought down from the pursuit of fabulous wealth—of unheard-of fame—to the prosaism of an existence I knew so well.

Had my father urged me to adopt any course—had he pictured to me the relief I could afford—the money my remaining at home would save—it might not have seemed so hard to decide; but he left it for me—uninfluenced, remember, by any sentimental exaggerations—by any special pleading—to do what I thought best and right.

And thinking it best and right to put self on one side—to consider the many instead of the one, I decided—and when I told him my decision, and heard him say, "God bless you, Tom!" a conviction stole over me that there might be something more blessed in life than having one's own way—namely, the consciousness of having striven to do one's best for those who were nearer and dearer than self.

"God bless you, Tom!" I think it no shame to say that my eyes filled when my father laid his hand on my shoulder and spoke those words, and that as we walked home through the twilight together, talking like friends, it seemed a finer and a manlier thing to face the realities of life, and conquer them, than to build air castles, which never an one might inhabit, even mentally, save myself.

CHAPTER V.

ALL ABOUT ROSE.

SO it came about that I remained at home, and helped my father. All the day long I was about the farm, or down at the mills—the upper mill, where the wheel was undershot, and where that rascal Bill, the herd boy, instead of keeping his charges from straying, fished in the pond, with a bent pin and a bit of string, whenever he thought my back was turned—and the lower mill, which, though more newly built, was more picturesque, since the water fell over the wheel, making a pleasant music all the day long.

Thus passed nearly four years, and during that time scarcely a day went by without my seeing Rose Surry. Sir Humphrey had always been friendly with my father, and in the habit of stopping at the mill, to chat over politics, or of accepting an invitation to enter our house—covered with creepers and roses—in order to say good-morning to my mother, and taste the last October brewing; and

although Lady Surry held herself aloof, as was natural, from such plebeians as ourselves, still a little incident, which occurred after I had been at home a year, compelled civility even from that stately dame, who, if only the daughter of a village apothecary, yet gave herself all those haughty airs which stamp the line of "Vere de Vere."

"Set a beggar on horseback, and he will ride to the devil," states an old adage; but Lady Surry, once mounted, did nothing of the kind. She simply galloped across the frontier line of a different class, and took up her position with them — a rare, haughty madam, who looked down upon the "lower orders" as inferior beings, and made herself offensive to a degree no one who has not come in contact with a woman of her type can imagine.

But, spite of her pride and conceit, there were things Lady Surry could not do. For example, she could not drive—she was not to the manner born; and though she would turn out in a low phaeton, sometimes drawn by a pair, sometimes by only one pony, every one saw that she had not the remotest idea how to manage a horse, and that if she failed some day to come to grief, it would only be through the special intervention of Providence, or, as not a few hinted, of that other power who is popularly, and, I must say, I think not fallaciously, supposed to take care of his own.

The service I was enabled to do Lady Surry arose out of her utter ignorance of equine nature, and was rendered in this wise.

One day, as I was walking into Crommingford, I beheld, at some distance from me, a phaeton in imminent danger of being backed into the ditch, for the horse which was harnessed to it had drawn right across the road, plunging furiously, whilst the driver—a lady—strove to mend matters by flogging the horse unmercifully.

The creature did not know what she wanted, and she did not know what she wanted herself; whereupon, seeing that the result could only prove a smash, and a bad one, I ran on to the scene of action as rapidly as possible, and arrived just in time to seize the reins, and prevent the frightened animal from overturning both itself and the vehicle.

Of course when I ran forward I did not know who the fair one in distress might be, nor for a moment afterwards, indeed—not until she spoke — was I aware that I had saved Lady Surry from what might have proved a serious accident, neither did she recognize me.

"I cannot think," she began, in a tone wherein anger and fear were about equally mingled, "what is the matter with the horse. He never did so before."

"Perhaps he never had the same reason," I said while stroking the frightened creature, and trying to pacify him. "He has got the shaft inside the saddle; you must have been urging him on and then suddenly checking him. Here, my lad," I added, addressing the small boy in buttons—her only attendant — who stood on the other side of the horse,

apparently terrified to death. "When I back him you pull out the shaft—do you see?" but the boy either could not see or else would not do it, so I had to beg Lady Surry to alight, while we unbuckled the strap and extricated the shaft, which must have annoyed the horse inconceivably.

"Oh! it is you, Mr. Luttrell, is it?" she said, as I assisted her to the ground. "I am infinitely obliged for your kindness," whereupon I said it was nothing, all the time being well aware that Madam's fingers were itching to give me half-a-crown, and that she was bemoaning her fate, which had sent me instead of a labourer to her assistance.

After that I took the horse out, and walked him up and down for a few minutes—soothing him as best I could—then, when he seemed tolerably quiet, I harnessed him, spite of a few kicks and plunges. I was in my native element with the animal. I had been with horses all my life, and I felt almost superior for once to Lady Surry, whom I asked if she would allow me to drive her home.

"He is hardly safe for a lady's hand yet," I suggested; and, although with a bad grace, she thanked me for my offer, and accepted it.

As we went up the avenue I saw Sir Humphrey before us in the distance, and when we overtook him I pulled up, and jumping out, proposed to relinquish the reins.

"No," he said, when Lady Surry had told him the story in a garbled form, and without giving me the credit I thought I deserved, "as you have

managed so admirably, you had better complete your adventure by delivering my wife safely at home; you know, Matilda," he added, "what I always tell you, there is danger in your going out with only that boy, for you cannot drive—you never could—those phaetons are never safe vehicles at the best of times, and had the horse not been quiet as a sheep, it is hard to say where you might have been before Mr. Luttrell reached you."

Which was altogether a nice re-assuring speech for a man to utter to a woman of Lady Surry's peculiar mental organization, and I saw a flush rise nearly to her temples as she listened.

She bore the thrust well, however, merely answering with a little laugh, "I think, however, I can manage him now so far as the house myself, and I will drive on so as to meet Mr. Luttrell at luncheon."

Thus assuming that I intended lunching with her.

As the phaeton disappeared I turned to Sir Humphrey, and begged he would excuse me if I said good-bye.

"Indeed, I shall not excuse you at all," answered the Baronet, whose manner was hearty, and who meant what his manner implied. "My wife told me to bring you in, and I mean to do so."

But when I told him straightforwardly that I would rather not go to Old Court, that we dined early at home, and that if I were not in they would be waiting for me, Sir Humphrey seemed to under-

stand exactly how I felt about the affair, and pressed his hospitality no further, although he walked with me so far as the gate near the bridge already mentioned, aye, and even strolled a few yards further up the lane.

Perhaps it may have been this backwardness on our part—this determination not to thrust ourselves upon people who were wealthier and grander than we—that made Lady Surry more tolerant of Rose's visits to our house, or perhaps she did not know of their frequency.

Personally, I have always suspected that the good looks and flattering tongue of a young fellow employed in the lower mill, had much to do with the fact that Rose's nurse affected with her charge this particular spot of earth.

"It was so nice sitting by the water," one day she told me; but then, as there was water in Sir Humphrey's grounds, this assertion did not exactly "wash," for which reason, perhaps, she thought it well to add—

"And it is so pleasant to hear the mill-wheel going." A remark that, having a touch of poetry about it, looked to me still more suspicious.

Those were the days in which Rose and I became such fast comrades—in which we looked for the earliest primrose, and welcomed wild hyacinths, violets, and wood-anemones, like friends. Those were the days when we looked for the blue bonnets' eggs, and watched with the intensest anxiety for the moment when half-a-dozen young thrushes

should, at sight of us, open their bills for food—those were the days when my darling made her swords, and parasols, and butterfly cages, out of rushes—when we were all very innocent and very happy, and when I had experienced just enough of the world's disappointments and the world's anxiety to be aware of the value of a happiness which the troubles and cares of after life often prevent a man enjoying.

The sacrifice—I use the word for want of a better, for none occurs at the moment, which will exactly express my meaning—the sacrifice of my own inclinations I had made, and the footing on which my father put me when I made it, enabled me to take part in the family counsels, and as my father and I drew nearer and nearer together, I ventured to suggest many reforms in our *ménage*, and to institute domestic changes that seemed to me greatly needed.

Studying hard myself, and doing what I could to instruct Joan, whose education was grievously backward, seeing no chance of the younger fry being sent to school, and noticing that years, the most important of their lives, were passing away while they were learning nothing during their passage, I talked to my father concerning the expediency of procuring a governess capable of teaching the elder children, and initiating Joan into those feminine mysteries and accomplishments wherein, owing to the fact that my mother's time was always occupied

with the younger children, she bade fair to be so ignorant.

It was a good day for Joan when Miss Snowdon came amongst us, and the governess proved a comfort to my mother too, although at first, of course, she did not like the idea of having a stranger domesticated at our hearth.

Naturally, Joan sulked and rebelled a little at the commencement of the new dynasty, but after a long talk and walk she and I had one day together, she agreed she was growing old enough to be a "young lady," and to try to help in keeping things straight. Dear Joan, she made none the worse mother to our young ones, none the less careful an instructress when the time arrived for her to do her part, because she had once climbed trees, and stolen cherries, and perilled her neck, and torn her clothes.

In my short-sightedness I was wont to endure agonies of humiliation at the ways of my "boy sister," as I used to call her; but there was not one amongst us nine who turned out so true, and brave, and tender, and self-sacrificing, as Joan, and I have often thought since, that in the woods and by the river she must have conned those lessons which have stood her in such good stead many and many a time. If she did not learn what she knew from nature, where else could she have been so instructed? A grand girl you developed into, my sister, when the need came for you to exert yourself; and prosperity has not changed your nature, for you are the largest-

souled woman I ever met—one—even my love not excepted.

After Miss Snowdon had been with us for a time, one day, to our intense astonishment, Lady Surry called, not, as might be imagined, to request that all acquaintance between her daughter and Rose should cease, but to ask, as a great favour, if Rose might be permitted to join Miss Snowdon's classes. She had heard from Sir Humphrey, she added, "what a most superior person Mrs. Luttrell's governess was, and as Rose was too delicate and young to be sent to school, she felt most anxious for her to learn with other children, when emulation might induce application."

All of which being translated, meant that Lady Surry was beginning to feel ashamed of Rose, who really, so far as book-learning went, could not be considered any better than a little dunce, and that she most earnestly desired to avoid the expense and trouble of engaging a governess on her own account.

Clearly she had survived all her former fears of our encroaching on her condescension, for she was most gracious in her manner towards my mother, and actually went so far as to say she hoped she would come some day and see the gardens at Old Court.

Considering the gardens at Old Court were not worth seeing, and that my mother never went outside our gates excepting to church, Lady Surry's somewhat careful approaches to neighbourliness were duly appreciated by us all.

But it was settled that Rose should come and learn with our children, and accordingly each day in the summer my fairy used, attended by her nurse, or Hoskins, to come over dressed all in white, while in the winter she appeared a mass of bright colours wrapped up in furs. The darling face, looking out from its scarlet hood trimmed with white swans-down, seems to be peeping at me now. Oh, Rose, I loved you then, although I did not know it—although not a feminine face, excepting those of my mother and sisters, had ever glanced out of the windows of my air castles, I loved you sweetest—loved you when I used to run out and lift you from the phaeton, and carry you away to the school-room, where I set you down beside a blazing fire.

Every one was fond of the child—she was every-body's pet—she was in nobody's way. She was not very clever, but she could learn all it seemed likely she would ever need to know, and I helped her, and so did Joan, and she worshipped Joan, believing my sister to be the best, the dearest, the darlingest that ever lived.

Since his marriage, I do not believe Sir Humphrey had ever felt so happy as when it was arranged that his pet was to come and learn with our children. Sometimes he would take our house on his way home, and then it was wonderful to see the little eager face, and to hear the glad cry of "papa, papa," and to behold how, unmindful of all discipline, she would fling down her book and rush out to greet him, and be caught up in his great strong arms.

They would go away hand-in-hand together like a pair of children, Rose turning at intervals to nod to Joan, who always watched the little figure disappearing till it became a mere speck in the distance.

Once, too, when Lady Surry was invited to some grand house where it was impossible she could go without a maid, she wrote and asked my mother to take charge of Rose during her absence, and although we all felt Lady Surry was doing us the honour of making use of our poor house and its belongings, still we were too glad at the prospect of Rose's visit to feel resentful or other than delighted, to have the fairy princess all to ourselves for a whole fortnight.

It was during the course of that fortnight Dick Tullett, an old schoolfellow of mine, who had turned artist, and was down sketching in our neighbourhood, took a portrait of Rose, sitting in our porch, with her lap full of flowers, and her face turned half towards us, while her eyes were inclined to look slyly down. Dick had never until then thought of becoming a portrait or figure painter, but he succeeded so well in reproducing Rose on paper, that Sir Humphrey bought the crayon sketch from him, and Dick, with that adaptability which is one of the proofs of genius, at once abandoned trees, and turned his attention to men, or rather to women.

He is Dick Tullett no more to me or to anybody else; he is Richard Tullett, Esquire, R.A., who lives in a great house at the West End, and has painted half the female members of the nobility, and is

noted for his dexterous treatment of satin and pearls. He exhibits every year of course several portraits, which are so many advertisements and testimonials in his favour; he has become in his way—a bad way in my opinion—a tremendous swell, and is good enough to invite us to his "At Homes," which are held on Saturday evenings, with an appendix on Sundays for the benefit of a select few; but I do not like Dick now any more than I like his pictures. He could no more paint a child at this minute like the child he drew when scarcely out of his teens, than he could fly. They are all little ladies—all Misses—all lacking that sweet simplicity wherewith he surrounded my darling seated amid the flowers.

From his youth upward Dick always kept one eye fixed steadily upon the main chance, even though at the same time he might be looking with the other at his art; therefore it did not surprise me that he should accept Sir Humphrey's offer for a portrait he had really executed for and given to me. Neither will it astonish any one who may have the pleasure of Mr. Tullett's acquaintance at the present day, to know he never offered to draw me another.

In after days Sir Humphrey kindly lent the original to Joan, who copied it for me in her amateur fashion, and from that copy was executed by one of the most lovely portrait-painters I ever knew the miniature which suggested the title of this story, and which I have laid down before me as I write.

We were happy then in that glorious summer weather, happy as health and youth and inexperience ought ever to be. There was sunshine above, there were flowers all round and about our paths. We seemed to be living in a great house containing many rooms, the treasures of which could never change nor become exhausted; but our house, our beautiful habitation, was built upon the sand, and when, after the tempest which beat upon it, the rain had subsided, and the winds were still, behold we looked, and there remained not of all that grand pile one stone left upon another.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE-MAKING.

AFTER I had been "doing my duty," as people put it, for the space of three years or thereabouts, and when things were getting a little straighter pecuniarily, when spite of the bill of sale we had weathered some very ugly storms, and were beginning to consider ourselves in tolerably smooth waters, there came overtures of conciliation from Mrs. Graham, who wrote to say that having incidentally heard her nephew had relinquished his plan of letting me study for the bar, she could not refrain from expressing her regret at the fact. She had hoped, she said, to see one of the family in the way of making himself famous before she died and it was consequently a real grief to her (this Mrs. Graham, underlined) to learn that her nephew meant to waste the brains she understood I possessed on "guano and bran."

Why Mrs. Graham pitched on those two words as representative terms for agriculture and milling,

to this day I cannot comprehend; I only know she employed them, and that my father pondered over her sentence more perhaps than he might have done had it been differently worded.

Had Mrs. Graham's letter, however, contained no further sentence, it is needless to say the grief it expressed would have been disregarded, but the lady, warming with her subject, proceeded to greater lengths. She offered, in the event of my father permitting me to pursue the course originally intended, to let bygones be bygones, to pay all my reasonable expenses through college, and to allow me one hundred and fifty pounds a year till I had made the way at the bar she confidently anticipated for me. Should I care to gratify an old woman's whim, she went on, it would please her if I could come to town and arrange preliminaries. She wanted no thanks, it was purely to please herself she made the proposal, and she trusted in THIS case no feeling of jealousy on the part of my parents would frustrate her wishes.

Jealousy! I should like to have seen the person who could have made my parents jealous concerning the affection of their children!

Had my father given me this letter to read over quietly, when I was alone, I think nothing might ever have come of it—that my sense would have told me I was doing my duty where I was, and that, all things considered, I had no right to place my inclinations first, the help I owed my father second.

But he read the letter to me, and the thing coming

suddenly—at a time, too, when I was perhaps a trifle weary of the monotony of my work, when the old discontent was leavening all my nature—I could not for the moment help a look of utter thankfulness resting on my face—an exclamation of rejoicing escaping my lips.

"That settles the question, Tom," said my father—and though sobered in a moment, I begged time for consideration, for decision, he adhered to his text.

"I know where your heart is now," he replied to all my entreaties—"I know, and I will not baulk you again. Besides, things are much better now, Tom—and if—if anything happened to me, you are old enough, and business man enough, to see to them. And Joan is getting up, also—dear Joan!"

Dear Joan!—ay, truly the blessed angel of our house—who came to me when she heard the news, and bade me go forth, never doubting.

"I will try to take your place, so far as I can, Tom. I can see to most things, and help papa greatly; and he has set his heart, like Mrs. Graham and me, on your doing credit to us all—so go, Tom—go. It will be best for every one of us."

"If you were not here, Joan, I should not go a step," I said.

"Then for me—go," she answered, and I agreed. But Joan—dear Joan—could you but have seen to the end, would you have been so urgent, I wonder? Has all the success paid quite for the disappointment?

"But you might have had the disappointment without the success," Joan would suggest, were she here at this moment, and I subscribe to this, believing honestly that all we have to do with our lives is to bear the burden of them, and to try and make ourselves content with whatever lot God is pleased to give us.

And so it was all settled that Mrs. Graham's offer should be accepted, and I go up to London to see the old lady—and life. At the risk of being considered either untruthful or methodistical, I found both about equally dull. London, I take it, to a youth who has been decently brought up, and who has no friends in the great metropolis, is as stupid a place as a quagmire on the river. I had no one to take me to see those sights which are really interesting—I had no one to talk to—no one to tell me the places of amusement at which a few hours might be spent pleasantly.

There is no town where a lad cannot find plenty of people to indoctrinate him into its vices and its follies; but these casual acquaintances had no charms for me. I was not exactly like a boy let loose from his mother's apron strings, and when, in sheer disgust and *ennui*, I turned back to the poor lonely woman in Queen Anne Street, who was going to do so much for me, that I felt my leisure hours were due to her, she received me with such gratitude, as convinces me now her married life could not have been a life drenched through and throug' with rose water.

Of my college experiences I do not intend to give you any record; I worked hard, and ultimately proved successful. I had my troubles, but I extricated myself from them. I got into debt—more shame for me—but managed to satisfy the people who had trusted to my honour?—shall I say without troubling my father? I had my flirtations—one a trifle too serious, so far as the girl was concerned, to recall now without regret; but all these things have affected my life but little. What did influence it, was that evening in the early spring time, when I stood with Rose Surry under the apple trees, whispering my love.

I have already repeated what she said to me afterwards, and the reader may conclude from that what words were foregone. Truth was, we had always loved each other, and whenever we came to years of discretion—nay, rather to the years when folly seems wisdom—we could refrain from speech no longer. It was so sweet to stand there in the moonlight, with my arm round her waist, unmindful of father or mother—of social differences—of ways and means of marriage—of houses—servants, equipages, friends, society—of aught save love.

Had I the gift of that successful Academician, Richard Tullett, Esq., I should like to present you with a sketch from memory of my darling, as she stood in the moonlight, with her dear head a little drooping, listening to the old, old story, that was then all new to her—new to her—yes, new to both of us. I am grateful to remember it was so, Rose—

that I never really loved a woman before—that I have never, in the true acceptation of the word, loved a woman since. Oh! sweet, pure face, did the moon's light ever fall on anything more beautiful! Oh! slight, fragile figure, did poet ever dream of aught more exquisite than your tender grace! Oh! dear, true heart — mine is breaking now to think of all it had to endure. Though grey hairs are plentifully mingling with the black — though my cheeks are furrowed, and Time's chisel has been busy tracing lines across my forehead — though I am growing old, and feel often that the end is nearer than the beginning, still, recalling this night all our story, memory leaps back over the years, and the bliss and the anguish are both as keen now as they seemed in the days when we both were young—when we loved, when we hoped, when we lost.

I was twenty-five years of age that very day, and my darling a little over sixteen; but she was in many ways younger than her age then—just as she had been younger than her age when first I knew her.

To her parents she seemed only a child still, while to mine she was no older than Patty, who had only been promoted to long dresses and turned-up hair a few months previously. Joan was the only one who suspected our affection one for the other, or who guessed, when she came to call us in to supper, why we had lingered in the orchard so long.

I suppose, had Rose been a model young lady, she would, instead of letting me know that I was more

to her than anybody in the world, have referred me to her father—as we are well aware that fathers usually know more of the secrets of their daughters' hearts than daughters themselves; but then Rose was not a model young lady, and chanced to be, unhappily, also an utter coward, dreading her mother's anger—never so happy as when she could keep every occurrence of her life from that matron's knowledge, and never so wretched as while dreading that "perhaps mamma might get to know—perhaps some one might tell her."

For myself, I confess that although clearly I ought either to have asked Sir Humphrey's consent to my addressing his daughter at all, or proceeded next morning to Old Court, there to unfold a tale, I did nothing of the kind, and were I to pass my life over again, I should still do nothing of the kind.

I never could understand, and I never shall, learned in the law as people imagine me to be, why the moment a man has whispered a love tale, he should be expected forthwith to ice his passion by requesting an interview with the beloved object's father—why he should, within twenty-four hours at latest, be required to chill his tender affections by entering, hat in hand, the library where paterfamilias receives him grimly—(I am speaking, of course, of those cases when a man has not ten thousand a-year and a title, and is consequently utterly ineligible, excepting in the eyes of the "one only,") and going through a statement of his affairs, which in the nature of things cannot, and

does not, prove satisfactory, but always leaves the stern parent full of dark suspicions concerning his income, his prospects, his connections, his habits, his expenses, and himself.

It has often occurred to me that it would save much trouble and anxiety both to the lover and the beloved object's friends, if after a certain amount of spooning had been gone through, and the sentiments of dearest Donnabella ascertained, the young aspirant for matrimonial honours were to write somewhat in this fashion to Donnabella's natural protector :—

"SIR,

"I beg to inform you that, having every reason to believe your beloved daughter regards me with sentiments warmer than those of mere esteem I have placed a statement of my affairs in the hands of Messrs. Crisp and Sutton, Accountants, Throgmorton Street, who in the course of a few days will communicate with you on the subject, when I trust the result may prove satisfactory. With reference to the respectability of my antecedents and present position, I beg to enclose testimonials which would I flatter myself, convince the mind of even a Marlborough Street magistrate.

"Your obedient servant,

"DONNABELLA'S LOVER."

The advantages of such a course of proceeding must be at once apparent. It would be pleasanter

for the young man, for the young woman, and for the young woman's friends, and it would further produce another most desirable effect, namely, enabling Donnabella's lover, when he became her husband, to silence those remarks concerning Donnabella's not "having known," and Donnabella's lover having deceived her before marriage, which occasionally, when the veneer of the walnut-wood furniture begins to crack, and the paint of the newly decorated villa to peel off, and the first brightness of the bran new carpets to fade, are apt to be made by even the most devoted of wives, and the best of women.

I, at all events, after sunning myself in Rose's smiles, never dreamt of venturing into the keen frost I knew I should have to encounter in the presence chamber at Old Court, and indeed, when I told Rose that I loved her—and she said she loved me—marriage seemed as far distant from us as death.

There was no need to think of or to plan for it. Years must pass, I knew, before it would be possible for me to take Rose away from her parents; but she was so young, this seemed a matter of little consequence, and I felt so sure of my own ultimate success, of my own ability eventually to surround her with every luxury she was likely to desire, that I felt it no dishonour to let her even in stealth engage herself to me. I knew no one could love Rose as I loved her, I knew no one could make her so happy, and finally I could not help telling her all

that was in my breast. Many an evening during that visit home, the words, though trembling on my lips, remained unuttered. It was all such fairy land, that I dreaded speaking, lest speech should destroy the illusion. True love always makes a man timid, and I remained silent when my heart was full, lest my dove, instead of nestling in my bosom, should be frightened away.

But somehow it all came about naturally that evening. I was leaving on the morrow, and Rose looked sad; I told her I should be back again for a long long visit in the summer, and then she sighed and said she feared she should not be at Old Court. That very day Lady Surry had spoken of the necessity of their going abroad, as Sir Humphrey's health had lately been anything rather than satisfactory.

Then I asked her if she should be glad to go, and she said she should like to visit the continent, but—

"But what, Rose?"

"I have never been very much with mamma, and I shall be sorry to leave Old Court and Joan."

"And no one else?" I asked. My heart seemed to stand still at my own temerity, but the plunge had been made, and I must go on.

How I went on I cannot remember, and if I could I should not tell; all I can say is we stood there steeped in bliss, as the orchard lay steeped in moonlight, and the fairy tale of her childhood had come actually to pass, and in answer to my question she

said, with that slight lisp which comes back to my ear now—the merest suspicion of a lisp—"It all happened in this garden, Tom, and the prince and princess are you and me."

Oh! royal land of love, which may be trodden alike by peer and peasant, in which each man, whatever his estate, may feel a king! I wonder if any two who ever entered your domain were so happy as Rose and I that night; for us the curse seemed lifted from the earth, to us the supper table, to which Joan summoned us, seemed spread with viands that tasted as food had never tasted before—we felt no sorrow, we experienced no dread—and when we left the dining-room, and passed into an apartment which was lighted only by the moonbeams, in order that Joan, as was her custom, might sing to my father before he retired for the night, I silently pressed Rose's hand, in order to emphasize the words of Joan's song, and in return the little fingers closed on mine with a clasp that seemed to say: "Never, Tom—never—for ever."

There are some ballads which seem to mix themselves up with one's life. It does not matter how slight the words may be, or how simple the melody to which they are allied—they still link themselves with the recollection of events, still after long years float plaintively through the chambers of memory.

As I remember the moonlight and the apple blossoms, the swift tender expression that passed over my darling's face, the pressure of her hand,

the touch of her hair when it swept my cheek as I drew her towards me, so likewise I remember the ballad Joan sung that night, with a certain intention and meaning, I thought, but perhaps I might be mistaken; yet if not, the words were strangely applicable to our position. Here they are:—

"I never can forget thee,
Whate'er my lot may be;
In sadness or in joy, my heart
Will ever turn to thee;
The fond remembrance of the past
May sometimes bring regret,
But till my life shall cease to be,
I never can forget.

"I never can forget thee,
My destiny is cast,
For as thou wert my first love,
So thou wilt be my last;
You say I soon shall cease to think
That we have ever met,
But oh! you little know my heart,
To say I can forget."*

Joan sang other songs that night, but of them my memory holds no record. Love never does, save of the things which concerns itself; save for the beloved object it is essentially selfish. I fear Rose and I were essentially selfish, as seated close

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* The words of the above, which are written by Miss E. Hersee, have been wedded to a simple and touching melody by Mrs. John Holman Andrews.

beside one another we listened to the music. *Knowing what we knew,* it was sufficient to be near, breathing the same air, hearing the same music—ah! me.

Suddenly it seemed so to my imagination, but in reality I suppose after a long succession of sweet sounds, Joan rose from the piano.

"Do you know how late it is?" she asked, putting her hands on my shoulder; and I started to remember Rose had only stayed with us to supper, after much persuasion, and on the positive assurance that I would see her home early, before Sir Humphrey and Lady Surry returned from a dinner party whither they were gone.

"I will put on my bonnet at once," Rose said, guiltily, and then with the charming readiness and equivocation natural to her sex, she added: "I forgot everything, dear Joan, while listening to your singing."

Did you, love? I think not quite.

When she hurried from the room to invest herself in the warm wraps which Patty insisted she should wear, Joan, coming quite close up to me, observed: "I shall walk home with you, Tom."

"No, no, Joan," I answered, pettishly, "you had much better not venture out in the night air."

But Joan, drawing me aside to one of the windows, stuck to her resolution. "Last evening I should not have offered the infliction of my company, but to-night I insist," she said. "Last evening no matter what any person had remarked, you might have

defied him, but now the case is different. I shall be dreadfully *de trop*, of course, but I mean to make one of the party, nevertheless."

Which she did, keeping close beside us on the open road, where we might possibly meet some passer-by, and lingering behind as we entered the avenue, when my hand stole to Rose's, and Rose's little palm pressed against mine in token of dear remembrance of the words we heard that evening mutually uttered.

Joan, if you were not so high above me, mentally as well as socially, I should like to ask, as a mere matter of curiosity, where you learnt all the lore you used to such advantage on the occasion in question.

Not out of any book, so much I can swear, since no book of the sort has ever been written; not by experience, for girls, unless they lead the lives of utter Bohemians, must, for reasons too numerous to mention, remain experimentally ignorant of these matters, until a lover appears for whom they care. Now, though there were one or two individuals who "came after" Joan, to use an expression current in our part of the world, there was nobody Joan wanted to come after her. My hoyden sister held her head rather high for her position, suitors said, thus reconciling themselves to the rebuffs they received; but though Joan has since married above her then station, I knew she was not waiting to carry her wares to a better market.

Only like many girls she had her ideal of a hus-

band, and none of the young men who sought her love fulfilled that ideal, wherefore Joan was still heart-whole, and yet she knew by intuition all Rose and I had to say to each other.

I should like to be a woman for a time, in order to be able to understand the reason of this wonderful instinct which they possess.

Truly as the author of School remarks: "Bless them, they know everything, and what they do not nature teaches them."

But how does nature do it? I wish Mr. Robinson had added that piece of information.

When we drew near the house, Joan came to Rose's side, but she did not talk, or seem to hear my whisper to Rose as we stood before the hall door: "Are you happy, love?"

She lifted her dear eyes to mine, and as the moonlight fell full upon her face, I could read there no shadow of disquietude, no trace of doubt or regret.

"You know I am," she murmured shyly; and then Hoskins, grown gray and stooping, appeared, and Joan and I bade her good-night, and walked back together, talking as we went about it all, and the best course for us to pursue.

And we both agreed, for reasons which the sagacious reader may easily imagine, that the best thing for the three of us to do under the circumstances, was to say nothing whatever—for some time, at least—about the fact that I loved Rose, and that Rose loved me.

When in my childhood I was inducted into the mysteries of English grammar, and learnt in Lindley Murray the famous sentence anent Penelope, I never imagined that a similar form of speech could come to mean so much to me.

"You will have to be very careful, though," Joan remarked; "you must not let any one suspect your feelings till you have spoken to Sir Humphrey. That was the reason I wished to chaperone you to-night. Tom, confess that for a moment you actually hated me?"

But I would not confess, and declared that her society had added greatly to the pleasure of our walk. Nevertheless, Joan held to her opinion.

CHAPTER VII.

I SEE SIR HUMPHREY.

IT is a great pity that when a young man tells a young woman he loves her, it is thereby implied and understood—always supposing the young man means, as the lower ten millions say, to "act honourable"—he is to marry her with all convenient speed. It would be so nice if the matter could go on for a little time — even, shall we say, for a fortnight—without the fact of the adored one possessing a body which will need to be supplied with necessary food, and provided with sufficient raiment, being forced upon his attention. This is a point on which women have such an advantage over us. "How much will it cost?" need never occur to their minds—unless, indeed, with reference to their trousseau, and then somebody else pays for it.

It shakes down a quantity of the apple blossom at once, having to consider that accursed pecuniary question. Man being a reasoning animal, and therefore unhappy, has to consider, while seeking his

mate amongst the flowers of early spring, whether he shall be able to provide haws and berries enough for her sustenance in the winter weather. I am not aware that such considering does much good, or that looking forward, as it is called, really betters one's position; but the whole thing has come to be such a recognised necessity of British society, that one might as well turn atheist at once, or unbeliever in the happiness of being possessed of fifty thousand a-year, as strive to evade it.

Even mentally I did not, and I cannot say that the study of ways and means increased my happiness. The very next morning after I had declared my love, I awoke with a new sense of bliss, and a new sense of misery, on me. I loved — I was beloved; but, alas! it was needful for me from that hour to consider how soon I could provide a nest for my darling—a home I could ask her to share.

This was the weariness. So far as Rose and I were concerned, we could have gone on love-making patiently for an indefinite period; but then in the present admirable state of society, which requires that before a man begins to make love, he shall ask the beloved object to fix the marriage day, this was impossible. Had we only been the persons whose inclinations needed to have been consulted, we could rapturously have taken lodgings, and billed and cooed on a second floor, a respectable wedded couple; or we could have corresponded, writing love-letters by the five hundred, and wandered about the

lanes of Cromingford when I found leisure to return thither, till luck changed and I could feel safe in asking my love to share the discomforts of a newly built semi-detached villa, to which paradisiacal abode we might invite our friends, if we had any —wishing them at Jericho all the time.

But either plan, and both plans, Mrs. Grundy negatived.

"You shall neither," so that worthy lady said to me, whilst I was shaving next morning, and, in the process, cutting my chin—"You shall neither marry Rose on your terms, nor court her as you wish. If the thing is to be at all, you must first face your position, and then Sir Humphrey; after which you may perchance have a few blissful moments—more possibly not."

Whereupon I anathematized both Mrs. Grundy and my razor, and resolved to let things remain.

I am happy to think things remained, for what do you imagine occurred? Lady Humphrey, who would persist in considering Rose a child, asked my mother to take charge of her during her and Sir Humphrey's absence on the Continent, adding that, as of course Miss Surry's visit would entail extra expense, she and Sir Humphrey should wish, being aware of our circumstances, to render that expense as light as possible.

To which my dear mother—Heaven bless her!—replied, never thinking, that as one child was away, and dear Rose would but fill the place of their absent son, she and my father could not think of

looking upon, or receiving her, save as a visitor—one of the family.

Whereupon Lady Surry wrote a very polite letter of acknowledgment, accepted the kindness as cordially as it was offered (?), and sent Rose.

Dear Rose, those were days spent in paradise to us. We were together from morning till night, we visited all the well-remembered haunts, we stood together where I rescued the bag, and we sat on the bank of the river as we had sat that day when Lady Surry appeared to spoil our enjoyment. Sometimes Joan was with us, sometimes we wandered about the fields and through the woods alone together. It was heaven that time. I hope I am not profane when I say I cannot imagine or understand any heaven where Rose and I shall not be permitted to wander, hand in hand, through the Elysian fields.

"Purified," suggests an evangelical relative. My dear saint, love purifies. Rose and I were pure in those days, in thought and word, as God's holy angels.

"Married," suggests a cynic. "And mated," I answer, which disarms his satire.

There is some truth, I do believe, in the old Scottish idea that he who laughs uproariously over night is "fey."

In Mr. Grant's novel, the "Romance of War," which I have not read for a quarter of a century or less, there is an account of a certain Cameron of Fassifern, who, enjoying himself more than his wont

as it might be to-night, died not ingloriously on the following day. And sometimes, when Rose and I were standing in the full sunlight of love, there would steal through my mind a memory of that olden superstition.

It was too much, we were too happy; the bliss was too great for earth, the cup too full to be carried steadily to our lips. And yet, my darling, if you could speak to me now, I think, spite of all that followed, you would accept the subsequent grief rather than have the sunshine and the love of those summer days blotted out from memory. I know I would; and much as you suffered, sweetest, I rather fancy that, being a man, my share of the misery was worse than yours—at least I hope so now, as I hoped so then.

Parents are slow to recognize the possibility of their sons and daughters falling in love, and mine proved no exception to the general rule. Further, they were a little thrown off the track on which my affections were at that time travelling express, by various allusions which Mrs. Graham had considered it necessary to make in her letters home, concerning a certain Miss Sherlock, whom I certainly thought a handsome girl, and whose father, a solicitor in good practice, seemed inclined to give me that countenance and assistance of which sucking barristers stand so much in need.

I am not aware that any false delicacy should prevent my stating Miss Sherlock then loved me, but the love was all on her side. Caring for Rose, I

could not have loved another; but it pleased Mrs. Graham, spite of all my disclaimers, to insist I was smitten in that quarter, and she was never weary of telling me what a desirable match it would be.

Not that I think in her heart she much liked Miss Sherlock, but the old lady had a keen appreciation of the value of loaves and fishes, as was natural, seeing she had never possessed anything else of value in her life; and Mr. Sherlock, as has been said, was powerful and willing, and the moderate amount of success I had as yet attained was owing entirely to him.

I knew in those days that Miss Sherlock was well inclined enough for a flirtation with me, but I did not know she had lost her heart. If I had, Mr. Sherlock's briefs might have gone to some other struggling individual; but as matters stood, I thought it no sin to be civil to the daughter, and to accept the father's invitations.

He was playing his little game, though of course it is only afterwards one can see the moves on the chessboard of life, and his game was to push me on and let me marry his daughter.

He did me the honour to think I had brains, and as he put it, "the stuff in me," and people have since been good enough to say that Mr. Sherlock's penetration was correct.

Certainly few people in London at that time shared the lawyer's opinion, so I felt grateful to him accordingly.

Having their heads full of Miss Sherlock, there-

fore, my parents never gave a thought to the well-known fact, that "propinquity is dangerous," and that my propinquity to Rose was very close indeed, until one day when my father came upon us seated on the river-bank, a little above the upper mill and pond. It was an utterly secluded spot, with alder trees shading the stream, and a rather steep piece of ground covered with filbert trees and brambles, rising on the other side of the stream. No one ever passed that way, and when after picking our way up the bed of the river, we came to a smooth bit of turf, the only piece of the bank which was clear of trees and underwood, and sat down there with the branches closing almost above us, and the ivy that grew over the old thorn bushes, making trailing wreaths, through which wild convolvuluses entwined themselves, we felt almost as though we had found some desolate island where never a creature dwelt but ourselves. We were wont to sit there sometimes in utter silence, listening to the rippling of the stream, to the humming of the bees, to the songs of the birds, wrapped in a happiness too deep for words. But on that especial day I was talking to Rose about my hopes and plans, while all the while I held her dear hand clasped in mine, unconscious that at the time my father, whom some unhappy chance had led into our wilderness, crossing the stream where it took a sudden bend, was looking disapprovingly on our proceedings.

He never came near us, however, but walked home much exercised in spirit, and disappointed, so

he afterwards told me, in his son, while Rose and I unsuspecting wandered home soon afterwards across the fields—happy—oh, friends, how happy I could never find words to tell!

After tea my father asked me if I would come with him to the mill, and though I should rather have remained at home near Rose, I at once consented. We passed half way down the avenue and then turned off through a field path, where not a soul was in sight. When we entered this my father said suddenly—

"What is all this between you and Miss Surry, Tom?"

The question took me aback for a moment, but then I answered:

"The old story, sir, we love each other, and some day hope to be man and wife."

"And how long has this been going on?"

"Since I was down in the spring."

"Have you spoken to Sir Humphrey?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I am ashamed of you," said my father, hotly. "I did not think any son of mine could have acted so dishonourably as to take a mean advantage of a girl's ignorance, and allow her to engage herself to him without the knowledge of her parents. You must leave here to-morrow, and I shall write to Sir Humphrey at once."

"Excuse me," I answered; "but if Sir Humphrey must be written to, I shall write to him myself. Of course I am well aware, that situated as I am

at present, communicating with Rose's parents will put an end to the matter at once, so far as seeing her is concerned; but since you put the matter in that way, I will take the risk."

"I am disappointed in you," my father proceeded, "you should never have spoken a word of love to the girl till you were sure of her father's consent; and now when all the harm is done you will not even confess you were wrong."

"I do not think I was wrong," I answered, "I cannot think in our rank it is necessary for marriages to be contracted like royal alliances; I have loved Rose all my life—I shall never love, and I shall never marry another—and I mean to marry her if fifty Sir Humphreys refused their consent."

"Your love-making shall not go on under my roof at any rate," he replied; "and till you have obtained Sir Humphrey's permission to address his daughter you shall never meet, if I can prevent your doing so. You seem to forget the disparity in your positions—the objection Sir Humphrey may naturally make, not only to your want of means—but to the difference in rank, which unquestionably exists between you and Miss Surry."

"In a worldly point of view," I replied, "it strikes me that a rising barrister is pecuniarily not a bad match for the daughter of an almost pauper baronet, for Rose will certainly not have one sixpence of fortune; and with regard to the social differences of which you speak, although county people might not yet leave their cards on my wife,

still I am not aware that perfect happiness is to be compassed even by an acquaintance with those who certainly only tolerate Lady Surry, and sneer at the poverty of her husband."

"We have had enough of this, Tom," said my father.

"For me quite enough," I replied, and for the first time in our lives, my father and I parted in anger.

As for my mother, her regrets, to my intense amazement, took quite another form. She was sorry she had asked Rose so much to the house — not because she feared what Sir Humphrey might think of the matter — but because she considered my darling a most unsuitable wife for any save a wealthy man.

"She was delicate, she was penniless, she was not the girl to advance a husband's prospects, she knew nothing of household affairs (this from my mother, who never tried to know anything of them), she was very lovable, and very amiable of course, but my mother had hoped I should make a different choice. That Miss Sherlock, for instance, about whom Miss Graham wrote often—"

"Oh! confound Miss Sherlock!" I exclaimed. "If there is to be peace between us, mother, never name that woman and Rose together in the same sentence again."

"Tom," broke in Joan at this juncture, "you had better not say anything more about the affair at present, mamma will think differently after a time, and so will you."

"If you mean that I shall ever think differently about Rose, Joan," I began defiantly, but she answered:—

"No. I only mean that hereafter you will be able to understand how mamma and papa look at the matter, and they will understand how you feel."

What a dear good girl she was. She came to me when I was packing my portmanteau, and threw fresh oil on the waters.

By all means, she advised me to go and see Sir Humphrey, "and I should tell Mrs. Graham also," she added. "If she ever mean to do anything for you that will make her say so—and she ought—for she has not a relation in the world besides ourselves."

"I am afraid she wants me to marry Miss Sherlock," I said.

"Then the sooner she knows you are not going to marry Miss Sherlock the better," Joan declared. "Tom, take the little sketch I copied from Dick Tullett's portrait, and show it to her. I wish you could take Rose herself."

"I think I will," I exclaimed. "If she were of age I would marry her to-morrow morning;" and then I went on packing viciously, for my holiday and my summer happiness were both over. Our island belonged to us no longer — our secret was shared by others—the world and the world's opinion had stepped inside our paradise, and that serpent of modern society, Mrs. Grundy, had given us to eat of the apple of the knowledge of good and evil, and

told us we must wander no more through Eden, till I could show a balance at my banker's, a house suitably furnished, an income of so much per annum, and a life insurance which I could undertake to keep up for the benefit of my wife and children.

Correct possibly, but unpleasant. I thought so then, I think so now.

My last matrimonial experiment was carried out on Mrs. Grundy's own plan in all particulars, and as the world, which likes to have a finger in every man's pie, is perfectly satisfied with its results there can be no reason to doubt but that I was and am wrong, and Mrs. Grundy right.

Next day I left Cromingford, but before I went I had a long talk and walk with Rose.

To this of course my father objected, but Joan over-ruled his objection, for which I blessed her.

During that walk I told Rose everything. It is one of the characteristics of true love, I take it, that a man shall pour out his whole heart to the object of his adoration, let her be girl or woman —let her be capable of quite comprehending the position, or only able to grasp it through her sympathies.

My pet was little better than a child, yet she understood me.

"It is not papa I am afraid of, but mamma," Rose said. "Oh! Tom, make the best of it you can."

The darling had always lacked moral courage and this speech meant simply, "Show them your hopes for certainties."

Oh, love! oh, sweet! if God had been only pleased to create you a little stronger, you would have been perfect. As it is, you carried with you the human taint, which merely made me love you more.

For you were weaker even than I, my treasure, and a man likes to feel the arms that clasp his neck do not belong to quite an angel.

"Even if they refuse, will you love me, Rose?" I asked, and she answered, "Till death, Tom!" and, my darling, weak as He made you, the promise was kept.

So I went, but before I went my father and I were reconciled.

"If I have said anything disrespectful, sir," I remarked, "I am sorry."

"If I seemed harsh, Tom, it was only for your good," he replied. "I wish you all speed in your wooing, for I know no girl in the whole world I would rather see your wife than Rose Surry."

"Thank you, father," I said humbly.

"All I desire on earth," he went on, "is my children's happiness, compassed honourably."

"I hope you will never have cause to blush for one of us," I answered; and then we shook hands, as is the manner of male creatures in England, and I departed.

Do you smile, reader, at all this? Ah! believe me it is a fine thing to have a gentleman for one's father; I do not mean with a hundred ancestors, or a hundred thousand pounds in money, but

simply a gentleman, with a gentleman's simplicity, honour, and truth.

The fact did not do much for me, you will remark, ere this tale is finished, but you are wrong. It has stood me in good stead professionally, and the lessons of honour my father inculcated and taught us, not merely by precept, but example, helped us to fight the battle of life more bravely and more honestly than would otherwise have been the case.

Sir Humphrey and Lady Surry were expected to pass through London in the course of a few days, and Rose gave me the address of the baronet's sister, with whom they generally stayed when in town, so that there proved no necessity for me to take the journey I had at first contemplated, namely to Paris, in order to face the parents, who would, I felt confident, try to separate me and Rose.

On my return to town, my first care was to present myself in Queen Anne Street, whence Mrs. Graham had departed, having left London the previous day for Tunbridge Wells. As I had nothing to keep me in London, I followed her thither, and was welcomed most enthusiastically. How did it happen that I had tired of Cromingford so soon? To see me at that time of the year was the last thing Mrs. Graham stated she anticipated. Perhaps, the old lady went on archly, I intended joining the Sherlocks, who were gone to the Isle of Wight, as of course I knew—

Of course, indeed, I knew, for Mr. Sherlock had invited me to spend some time with them at Vent-

nor, but I had not the slightest intention of accepting his hospitality, and so I informed Mrs. Graham.

"I am not sorry to hear it," she replied, "I am not quite sure that I like Catherine Sherlock, or that I think she would make a good wife. She has her temper, or I am mistaken. Poor Puck (Puck was the poodle before honourably mentioned, a fat, lazy, pampered brute, that I cordially hated, and would have kicked had I dared) got his paw in a black lace flounce she wore one evening when she came to me, and tore it, and you should have seen how she looked. Of course you are not offended at my warning you."

"I assure you," I answered, "Miss Sherlock or her temper is nothing to me."

"Well, she wishes you were something to her," replied Mrs. Graham, "and at one time I certainly thought it might be a good match for you, but I hear they are living beyond their means, and that the girls will not have a sixpence."

"I am afraid that is a way nice girls have," I said.

"It is a very serious drawback, however," remarked Mrs. Graham; "take my advice, Tom, and never marry without some money, at all events."

"I should not like to marry without some money, certainly," I answered, "since manna has ceased to fall from heaven; but the fortune will certainly require to be on my side, since the only girl I

care for in the world in that way has not, and never will have, a penny."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said my auditor emphatically.

"I am not aware that there is any particular cause for sorrow," I replied. "We can wait."

"Then you are really engaged."

"Really engaged. I mean in a few days to ask her father's consent, which will of course be refused, but we must wait until he likes to give it."

"And why should he refuse his consent? What is there against you?"

"I am not aware that there is anything against me as an individual," I answered; "but the Surrys are much bigger people than ever the Luttrells were, even in their best days, and very probably Sir Humphrey may look higher for his daughter than a struggling barrister. I know I should were I in his shoes."

"You mean the people that live at Old Court. Upon my word, Master Tom——"

But there was no rebuke in her tone, nay, rather it sounded almost exultant, as she added—

"And pray how long has this been going on?"

"All my life, I fancy—at least, all my life since I first saw Rose—ever since she was a little thing like that," and I drew out Joan's copy of Mr. Tullett's portrait, and presented it to Mrs. Graham, who first put on her spectacles and then examined the face of my child love critically.

When she had looked it all over she returned me the sketch without a word.

After that pause she said, "I am afraid you have not been quite so thoughtful as you ought about Miss Sherlock. She certainly had reason to believe you cared for her."

"What reason?" I asked.

"Why you were always with them—with her—and you paid her attentions—and—and I am sure I thought you meant something serious."

"I am very sorry to hear you say so," I replied.

"Yes, it is unfortunate," remarked Mrs. Graham, "but now you had better leave me: I shall miss my afternoon nap if you stay gossiping here any longer—and I want to think over what you have told me quietly—you have done foolishly, Tom, but I am not angry."

Which was attributable, as Joan subsequently suggested, when she and I came to talk the matter over, to the fact of Rose being a baronet's daughter. The one desire of the old lady's life had been for years, that a Luttrell should do well in the world.

"And it would help you enormously," she said to me the next day, "to marry into such a family as that."

"Oh! aunt," I cried, for the pain of hearing Mrs. Grundy screaming in my ear was more than I could endure, "if Rose were the daughter of a labourer I should love her just the same, and I wish she were, for we could then marry at once."

"Romance," she answered, "all romance! Love

is all very well, Tom, but believe me, success is better."

In her heart did she think so I wonder, she who had nothing to love save parrot and poodle.

Whatever, however, her private opinions on that subject may have been, there could be no question of her approval of my choice. If there were times when qualms came over her, concerning Miss Sherlock's disappointment, and the share she might have had in causing it, these were but specks on the brightness of the rising grandeur and wealth she pictured as certainties for me.

"Tell Sir Humphrey Surry," she said, "that I, Blanche Graham, born Luttrell, will, if he consent to your marrying his daughter, make you my heir. With that prospect and your profession, you may seem a desirable *parti* in the eyes of any man of Sir Humphrey's means. There I want no thanks. I should have done the same for Joan had your parents' selfishness not refused her to me. Do not interrupt, Tom, I always shall think and say, it was selfish when they had so many, that they could not spare me one."

"But, aunt, Joan was as dear to them as any one of the others."

"I never said she was not," retorted Mrs. Graham "What I do say is, that they might have humoured my whims, after all I had done for your father, too —but still I am not sure that it has not all turned out for the best—I like you now better than I could ever have liked a girl; and if you marry this young

creature and bring her home to me, I shall forgive your father."

Bring her home—there was a frightful notion—in fancy I beheld my darling mewed up in Queen Anne Street, with the bipeds and quadrupeds mentioned at an earlier point in this story, but I did not mean to lose every point in the game by evincing the horror wherewith Mrs. Graham's casual remark filled me, neither did I intend—supposing Rose agreed—and I knew she would, the darling—to disappoint or act in any way unfairly towards one who offered to do so much for us.

Although I had looked forward to having Rose all to myself in some pretty home — no matter how homely—still I felt it was better to have her in Queen Anne Street than not at all, and so fortified with many Godsends and good wishes, I returned to London, and sought that interview in Devonshire Place which was, as I erroneously imagined, to decide my fate.

In this I chanced, however, to be mistaken; Sir Humphrey—or to speak more correctly, Lady Surry—for it was she who made every bullet which the old baronet fired—said neither no nor yes. I was not objected to on the score of either birth or fortune—but Rose was young—too young to enter into any engagement involving the whole of her future happiness. At the end of, say two years, I had permission to name the subject again, meantime I was not to see her clandestinely, neither were we to correspond.

How I rebelled against these conditions it is needless to tell. I prayed, I entreated, but I might as well have prayed and entreated a statue as Lady Surry; and Sir Humphrey, now rapidly falling into poor health, was but a mere tool in the hands of his wife.

"It is mamma—it is all mamma," said Rose, at the parting interview which Lady Surry graciously permitted; "but never mind, Tom, the two years will not be very long in passing. Think of all the years we have known each other already, and if I am not to see you I shall see Joan, and if I am not to write I will send you messages through her."

And so we kissed and separated; and I went back to London, and worked harder than ever at my profession; and although Mr. Sherlock was cool for a little time, still he soon relented, and put what briefs he could in my hands.

I know now he believed the Surry alliance would never come to anything. I know now Lady Surry merely entertained my proposals to the slight extent I have related, to the end that if no better suitor offered, Rose, in the event of her father's death, might not be left unprovided for. But at the time I was in blessed ignorance of everything, save the fact that when two years had expired I should be free to speak again, and, as I hoped, to some purpose.

"If I can only get employed in some great case," I thought, "my fortune is made." But though great cases came, and were tried, and caused a noise

in the world, my name never figured as counsel for either side.

I was young, I was almost unknown—there were plenty of abler men in the field—yet I did not despair. What though the fire of fortune was not yet kindled on my hearth—love still kept my heart warm—hope still sustained me.

If the path to success were rough and tedious, I felt, nevertheless, that I was treading it; and in my chambers, where I sat all alone night after night, eschewing company, and studying harder than man, I think, ever worked before, I had sweet visions of the fame and wealth which was to crown all my endeavours. Fame I only then desired, to gain Rose for me—wealth I only longed for, that I might keep her like a queen—my love.

And so a year passed, and my probation was twelve months nearer its close.

CHAPTER VIII.

JOAN'S LOVER.

IN the many letters which Joan found time to write to me during that year—and especially towards the close of it—there occurred so frequently the name of a certain Walter Surry, that, at length becoming curious on the subject, and also slightly jealous, I asked my sister to favour me with some information concerning the gentleman in question, and also how it happened that he seemed to be so much in the neighbourhood, and so constantly with Rose.

By the next possible post Joan's answer came. "*You need not be at all uneasy about Rose,*" she italicised; "*Rose is devoted to you; would never think of anyone else;* and Mr. Walter Surry only cares for her as a cousin."

"Then I suppose he cares for you not as a cousin," I suggested in reply; but to this there came no answer. From that day Joan mentioned his name as seldom as possible, and, putting the two things

together, I gathered that at last my sister was "hit," and that Mrs. Graham would probably ere long have good reasons for believing the "Luttrells were," to quote her favourite expression, "going to hold up their heads again, and be heard of once more in the world."

But I kept Joan's secret as she had kept mine, only waited patiently for results.

Walter Surry was the only son of that Gilbert to whom Sir Geoffrey left Grayborough Castle, and the estates and lands thereunto appertaining, which were valuable; together with the expression of a hope, which proved abortive, that eventually Gilbert would succeed to the title.

Gilbert did not succeed; he died within a very short time after his brother, and the estates and prospective title devolved consequently upon his only child, Walter, then a boy about my own age.

During his minority Grayborough Castle was left unoccupied, but now, after some years of foreign travel, Walter had taken up his abode there, and received much goodly company, his parties being matronized by his mother—a woman still handsome, Joan informed me, and very different indeed from Lady Surry.

Which, being translated, meant that Joan considered Mrs. Surry as agreeable as she thought Lady Surry the reverse.

To two of the balls which were given at Grayborough Joan was invited, and she sent me glowing

accounts of the splendour of the house and the beauty of the ladies—of the kindness which had been shown to her and my father, and the exceeding grace with which Walter Surry went through a quadrille.

What was there that man could not do better than anyone else, according to Joan's report? He could ride, shoot, swim, sing, dance in a more perfect manner than man ever did before. "My duets never sounded the same until Mr. Surry sang the second with me." "I have just returned from a long ride with Rose and Mr. Surry. Rose was afraid to gallop—but we had *such* a race over Wildmoor Common," and so forth. Clearly the hero had come, and Joan's heart was gone irrecoverably.

Although at first I could scarcely believe that she had made so mighty a conquest, yet, remembering her rare beauty, I did not as time went on feel astonished at the affair.

Walter Surry, though young, had nevertheless probably seen enough of the world to disgust him with fashionable dames; and the originality, talent, and simplicity which distinguished Joan had no doubt attracted him towards her.

To me, of course, it appeared strange that any man should care for Joan when Rose was present, but I adopted my sister's view of the affair without question, remembering her wonderful faculty of penetration, and rested content, resolving, however, that when I went down to Cromingford

for my summer holiday I would try whether, if no actual engagement existed, Mr. Surry could not be brought to the point.

Spite of my own delay and shyness in making my declaration, I always distrusted a man who in love matters hung fire, and I felt vaguely uneasy as letter after letter arrived from Joan and made no mention of his having said anything particular.

"If he be playing with her it will break Joan's heart," I thought, and by way of warning, I just ventured in a postscript to ask if Mr. Surry were anything of a flirt.

In answer to that question I received a manuscript—for I cannot call it a letter—which I would now reproduce, were sufficient space at command for the purpose.

Therein Joan recounted all the acts of the Surrys since time immemorial, and there was no word in all that chronicle of the baronets of Graysborough concerning a jilted or heart-broken woman.

Grand men were the Surrys, according to Joan's report—noble they had been since the beginning—even poor Sir Humphrey did his best to make a detestable wife happy, and what, then, could I mean by my question?

Replying to which appeal I said I had meant nothing, and Joan was pleased graciously to receive my statement as perfectly and undeniably true.

"But you will see him when you come down, Tom," she remarked, just as if the sight of Walter

Surry were likely to afford the slightest pleasure to me.

It wanted but a week or so to the time I had arranged to leave London, and go for my long annual visit to Cromingford, when, in the midst of the bright sun-shiny weather, I heard the first growl of the storm that soon burst over us.

There came a rumour one morning to the effect that the great Indian house of Hollington, Carr, Byrne & Co. had stopped; and I, knowing a considerable portion of Mrs. Graham's fortune had been left in that establishment, walked down to the city in order to satisfy myself there was nothing really in the report.

Of course all sorts of stories were afloat. Some said Hollingtons were good as the Bank of England; others that Hollingtons had long been shaky; some that the report would be contradicted in the next day's *Times;* some that the ruin would be found to be more complete and wide-spread than people at all imagined.

Of course the prophets of evil were right—there rarely is smoke without fire—and next day, in the money article, appeared a formal notice of the failure of that well-known firm.

At first I hardly grasped the full import of the announcement. Indeed I scarcely knew enough of Mrs. Graham's concerns to be aware that the bulk of her large fortune had gone down with Hollington's ship, and I shall never forget the sick heavy misery that oppressed me when, seated in Queen

Anne Street, my relation, with tears and lamentations, declared she was a beggar—that she might as well go to the workhouse at once—that of course everything now was ended between Rose Surry and me, that she could do nothing for herself, and consequently nothing for me, on whose advancement she had set her heart.

I sat there and listened—sat there in the midst of her curiosities, her carved idols from India, her knick-knacks from China, her shells, her figures, her japanned work and bon-bon boxes, her ancient furniture—dimly comprehending a crisis had come, that the last air palace of my erection was vanishing like its predecessors.

In my selfishness, at first I had scarcely a thought to spare for the poor old woman to whom money, and the things money could buy, had always seemed so precious—who had valued success so highly, and who now sat wringing her yellow wizened hands, and repeating that she would have to go to the workhouse, for there would never be a penny saved.

And there never was; but with the few thousands she still possessed, and which had happily been invested in the funds, I eventually purchased an annuity that enabled her to keep on the house in Queen Anne Street, and to live there without any perceptible diminution of stateliness and pretension.

To do her justice, she fought against my advice, and would have left her home to take up her abode

in a smaller mansion, so that the principal she still retained might come to me at her decease, but I insisted on having my own way, and after she had made her unselfish offer, I think the old lady was rather glad to keep the goods the gods sent her, and to take at the same time immense credit for her purposed generosity.

All this, however, is in advance of my story, for on the fine summer's morning when I heard all she had to say, I do not think I could have proposed a plan for her future support, had any one told me I should be hung if I failed to strike one out. I could think of nothing, feel nothing but Rose, and the fact that the prospective fortune which had exercised so large an influence in persuading Lady Surry not to listen to my proposals, was lost, lost hopelessly, needlessly.

True it may be said I was no worse off than in the days when, standing under the apple trees, I told my love tale; but I was just this much worse, I had led Sir Humphrey to think I stood on a certain equality of wealth, with good prospects, and every chance of eventually attaining to a good position and standing in life. I had not said, "I have nothing but my profession," but I had said, "I have every chance of rising at the bar, and in addition, Mrs. Graham will make an immediate settlement on my wife, and leave me the bulk of her fortune at her death."

And now, after a year, I was not a step nearer legal success, so far as an outsider could judge, and

I was minus the fortune, and Rose was twelvemonths older.

I thought I should go mad as all this swept through and through my brain, keeping a sort of time and measure to the poor ruined woman's senseless lamentation. Once the notion of going quietly down to Old Court, before it was known there that the failure of Hollingtons involved my aunt, and persuading Rose to elope, crossed my mind, but, alas! the days we lived in were not those in which I could carry off my beloved to Gretna in a chaise and pair.

And supposing they had been, and that I had carried her off, and found money to pay the expenses of the journey, and the blacksmith for his services, and the other incidental matters which no doubt made a marriage even at Gretna as uncomfortable an affair as it usually proves in England, how was I to earn a sufficient income to take that inevitable stucco and lath and plaster villa before alluded to, and furnish it, and pay servants' wages, and the baker and the butcher and the grocer and the milkman, to say nothing of other tradesmen and tax-collectors.

The money question seemed for a time to have lain comparatively quiet, and behold now in a moment was its venomous head upreared again, its forked tongue spitting poison at me all the while Mrs. Graham recited her dirge.

"There is nothing for me but the workhouse, and you will have to give up Rose."

Yes, I knew that—knew it without her telling me. It was my bounden duty, having toiled for a year vainly, and seeing the end more remote than ever, to relinquish the love of my life. If they would only grant me another year, I thought—if only—but I knew Lady Surry too well even for hope to deceive me; and I went down to Cromingford a dejected and heart-broken man.

There, fresh troubles awaited me. Affairs had latterly not been going well either at the mills or about the farm. With no one except Joan to help, (for the only one of my brothers who was old enough to prove of much assistance, had neither sufficient brains nor sufficient steadiness to drop into the place I had, unfortunately, left vacant,) things could scarcely be properly attended to; and besides, for two previous years there had been bad crops, and milling had barely paid its own expenses. As if this were not enough, that very spring a disease had broken out amongst our cattle, and carried off the best of all the milch cows; and when affairs were at the very worst, Mr. Reemes died, and his heir was already demanding the repayment of that two thousand pounds, with interest, which had for three years fallen, not totally, but a little, behind.

"I was, indeed, going to ask Mrs. Graham for assistance," said my father; "but when your letter arrived, I had to abandon that idea, and look our position in the face; and having looked at it, Tom, and considering that if I were to die, there is no one

to take the management, I think we had better sell off everything, pay our debts, and then—"

"Then what, father?" I asked.

"There will be, perhaps, something left," he answered; "enough till the younger ones get up a little, and the boys must work; they will never learn to work here, or to be good for anything but strolling about the fields, setting snares, and getting into mischief."

"I wish I had stayed!" I broke out, passionately —"I wish I had never gone away; I am of no use —none at all."

"Patience," he said; "it is not of what you are now, but of what you will be, Tom, you should think."

And, not to pain him further, I remained silent, though my heart was so full of grief, and disappointment, and regret, and anger, I could have cursed the hour in which I left my home, and went away to wander after the pot of gold, I had never yet touched, save in my dreams—and that I felt at that moment I should never touch, any more than I should find the end of that rainbow arch where, in nursery tales, that pot of gold is supposed to lie concealed.

At Old Court my interview terminated as might have been supposed. Sir Humphrey was heartily sorry, and, but for his wife, would, I think, have conceded the year I prayed for in which to try my fortune.

It was my own year, after all, I asked, the second

of the two originally granted; but then, as Lady Surry remarked when I reminded her of that fact, the circumstances under which this second year was granted were now changed, as much as my prospects.

She could not contemplate a marriage for her daughter where there was neither money, nor even the likelihood of money. Although Rose was not accustomed to great affluence, she had from her infancy been surrounded by every comfort; and she put it to me—having so bitterly the whip hand, Lady Surry could afford to be reasonable and temperate—whether there were even the most remote chance of my being ever able to support a wife—unless, indeed, she had a large fortune of her own—in the style in which she, Lady Surry, was confident I should wish?

"Sir Humphrey's opinion was identical with her own," Lady Surry proceeded. "They admired the candour with which I at once informed them of my altered fortunes, and they quite agreed with what was evidently my own conviction, namely, that the whole affair ought now to be as if it had never been."

"As if it had never been," I repeated, while I walked stupidly homeward. "I wonder if Lady Surry knew what she meant herself when she uttered that sentence."

I asked if I might see Rose once more, but Lady Surry thought it would be better not, that leave-taking could only distress the poor child

needlessly. She was sure (there were so many things she was sure, and certain, and confident of, during that interview) my great love for Rose would make me wish to spare her pain and sorrow.

It had better be by letter, if at all, Lady Surry suggested, and I agreed to this, but sent my letter to Grayborough, at which place I ascertained from Joan, Rose was staying. Lady Surry had not, with all her certainty, bargained for that move on my part, or I am greatly mistaken.

Before I left Cromingford, however, I saw her once, quite by accident. She was riding, not with Mr. Surry, but with an older and a handsomer man, and my jealous eye noted that he leant over towards her, and was talking earnestly as they drew near to me. They had evidently dropped behind a riding party which I met half a mile earlier, and he seemed to be availing himself of his opportunities.

"So be it," I thought, in my anger; "what can it matter to me?" and I would have let her pass without even a sign that I saw her, but suddenly checking her horse, she turned and followed.

"Tom!" I fancy her companion would have given a year's rental to have heard her speak his name in that tone. "Tom, did you not know me?"

"Know you!" I repeated; "but you must remember it is all to be over between us—I am no better than a beggar, and you—"

"I never thought about the money, Tom," she answered; "you got my letter telling you so, did

you not? I can never care for anyone else—I will wait for you till you are a great man—till I am a hundred"—and the dear hand fell on my shoulder, and she stooped over her saddle till her face almost touched mine.

"That gentleman, Rose," I suggested, warningly.

"I hate him!" she said vehemently, "I love no one but you, and I will love no one else, let them say or do what they like. If Mr. Lovell Allen choose to go and tell, he can do so. Oh, Tom, I am so wretched!" and her eyes filled with tears. "I wish I were a child again, and could run away and hide from it all."

"Rose," I began, steadily enough, "I have promised your father and mother to hold no further communication with you without their consent, but, darling, I shall not quite despair if only you will do one thing for me—marry no one else till after Christmas twelvemonth. If you see me in the church when you are decking it on Christmas-Eve, you will know I mean to speak to Sir Humphrey again; if not, you will understand, not that I love you less, but that I have tried to win you for the second time, and failed."

"I shall be there," she answered, "if we are in England; if not, I will manage to let you know—only it is such a long time—"

"Yes; but I have such a great deal to do in it," I murmured, and then the little fingers closed on mine, and we parted.

CHAPTER IX.

SUCCESS.

I SUPPOSE if any man could review all the events of his past life from the top of the hill of old age, whereon he is mythically supposed at a certain period of his existence to sit down and rest, there is not a single act in the whole drama which, were the power given to him, he would play again in the same manner.

The whole we can say about the steps we took, the paths we adopted, is that to our then judgment, those steps and those paths seemed the best that presented themselves; but then we will probably add in the next breath, "more is the pity that they should have seemed so, since they unquestionably led to evil." Now it was an evil I am sure for my father to give up his land and sell off everything; but it seemed to me a good thing at the time for him to clear himself of worry—as though any human lot is ever free from worry.

It was like tearing an old tree up from the ground to try and transplant him, but the transplanting was effected nevertheless. As for my mother she liked the idea of returning to London, though she disliked the reality much more afterwards, and so far as the children went, they were wild with delight and non-comprehension.

Joan, and I, and my father were the three who felt the moving most, each one of us perhaps for a different reason, but all possibly with equal keenness.

We talked about the dreariness of exchanging our pretty place for stuffy London lodgings, but we knew it was not so much the change of house or home which affected us, but rather the severance of all old ties—the impossibility of ever in the future re-uniting those connecting links between the present and the past which we were then in our blindness wrenching asunder.

By reason of a merciful foresight, Joan coming to town with me in order to prepare some place wherein our people might lay their heads, imagined how it would be, and entreated me to take not merely lodgings but some quiet house, with a little land, to which a portion of our stock might be removed.

"London would kill papa now," Joan said, "let us have a little place anywhere; one that I can manage, where they can go when they are tired of this, and the children want a run;" so as she said it was, and I secured a small cottage surrounded by

about ten acres of land, near Southgate, at a really low rent.

"If the worst come to the worst," Joan explained, "we can almost feed the children off the land; I do not mean by putting the darlings out to graze," she added, "but by managing and contriving."

Ah! Joan, though you were not my wife, nor for that matter the wife of anybody in those days, how often I have risen up at that country cottage and called you blessed, for if you had not been what you were now, could we ever have even with my poor help kept our brothers and sisters as we did, and cast the sunshine of easy contentment over the evening days of those who had been so good to us in the helpless years gone by.

It puzzles me sometimes now, Joan, how you have managed so to adopt yourself to different means and a different station. When I see you driving in your carriage—behold you entering your box at the opera, and hear you issuing your orders—to any one excepting me, even in the way you speak to your husband, there is unconsciously a tone of command—I cannot but wonder at the adaptability and versatility of your sex. You never made a sixpence really in your life, and I have a few—but yet I could no more go in for your grand manner than I could fly. I cannot help thanking the splendid creature in plush, who condescends to take charge of my coat when I go to lunch with you *tête-à-tête* in St. James' Square, and

how you can order and send him as you do, baffles my comprehension.

But then perhaps the battered sun-bonnet and the stolen cherries are less present memories with you than with me.

The faculty of forgetfulness is as great as prescience with your sex, my dear—happily.

On me devolved the trial of seeing the last of our dear old home. I went down for the auction. I paid off the bill of sale; I reserved the few things we required, the cattle we desired to keep—further, I retained an old man who had been in our employ for years, to take charge of the live stock, and their new home, and "if you would like to stay with them, Sam, you can," I added; hearing which, Sam, who had neither chick nor child, wife nor mother, went straight away, and, disposing of his few household gods, adopted ours, and remained one of us till his death.

These are all simple records, friends—but this professes to be none other than a simple story—too simple, I fear, to find favour save with the few who like to hear better about still life, and the untragical existences most of us lead, than to read concerning nature's storms, and the violent crimes and passions of our humanity.

In the plot of a modern Macbeth, of what use could Sam seem, save to carry the poisoned bowl, or sharpen the fine Damascus steel? Yet in our poor lives he filled in a not unimportant part.

He carried "home" with him to London. No

place would have seemed one to us without Sam. No cow could have calved properly, no sow farrowed, no hen been set, without Sam's assistance and knowledge; and on my way between Colney Hatch Station and Southgate, whither I drove in a pony cart belonging to the small farm, drawn by a pony which, for speed and beauty, could not, though I say it, have been matched in the county of Middlesex, Sam was wont to entertain me with stories of the cattle, the fowls, the dogs, the family, that filled me, coming as I did each week from the midst of strangers, with an unspeakable delight.

But all this time I am wandering away from Cromingford, where the neighbours were very kind, and bought up everything, at good prices—God bless them!—for those prices made all the difference to us. As I have said, I satisfied the bill of sale, and, as I have not said, I paid all our debts, small and big; and then I gave up the place, walking away from it by a long, green, back avenue, which led neither to nor from anywhere in particular, feeling, as I passed each well-remembered spot, that I should never again return to the haunts of my boyhood.

I had some reason then to suppose that at a uture time that neighbourhood would retain its charms, for hope, as I told Rose, was not quite dead within me; but yet, as I closed the wicket gate of the ruined entrance I have mentioned, and turned back for one last look over the familiar scene, I *knew* I should see the old homestead, with

the horses being brought back after the day's labour, no more for ever.

And I never have, and I feel confident I never shall.

It did not turn out so badly as might have been anticipated, and this fact first induced me to think that my father—that we all might have been wrong. When, after a man is sold up, he proves considerably more than solvent, it is difficult to imagine why such a breaking-up was ever deemed expedient. Yet there are more bankrupts than those, who feel money dropping from their pockets faster than they can shovel it in—men who do not fail because money is difficult, or credit an impossibility, but merely because life, at the best, not being an easy struggle—they weary of it when health begins to fail and energy to subside—they weary and sicken of the battle.

They want peace on any terms; they care little who wins, so long as they are permitted to lay down their arms—and thus it proved with my father. He asserted the fight had been too much for him, and he was glad to have done with grim debt and grimmer difficulty, and come even to London lodgings, which he subsequently exchanged, with something more than pleasure, for the cottage previously mentioned, whither I had sent some of the household stuffs, and a few familiar chairs and tables that would, I fancied, make the new place seem a little like an old home.

For myself, I took to literature—that usual

resource of poor briefless men—and earned money. I did not earn much; but visions of fabulous wealth, which was to be the proceeds of a certain work on which I was then engaged, floated before me, making the prosaic two guineas I had once approved of, seem like dross in my eyes.

Were that work—it was one of fiction—to appear now, I could make quite enough out of it to live on for a year; but the unhappy thing is, I could not write it now. One cannot write a good novel twice any more than one can cut an eye-tooth; and, unhappily, the time of life at which one does cut an eye-tooth is not usually considered favourable to mature judgment—and so one gets paid accordingly for one's first novel, only one cannot write that first novel twice, which seems a hardship.

Joan, my sole confidante, took occasion, when Rose was staying at Grayborough, to inform her of the fact of my authorship, and numerous letters on the subject were interchanged between the pair.

It was only from Grayborough Rose could write, Joan informed me, since Lady Surry had tabooed their correspondence.

"Rose does not care, however, so long as her mamma does not know," Joan remarked—as I have before observed, my angel's views on the score of strict morality were feminine and somewhat oblique,—"and Lady Surry never told me not to write to her, so I shall as long as I can."

But the correspondence, like Rose's visits to

Grayboorugh, were broken off by another continental tour, in which Rose took part, and then I was utterly disconsolate—more especially after one day when I said to my sister,

"Do you ever hear now from Mr. Surry, Joan?" and she suddenly broke out crying.

"Never Tom, never. I am afraid I made a great mistake, and that it was Rose, after all."

Rose after all—ah! well, love may be a very fine passion, but it is also a very selfish one, for I gave scarcely a thought to Joan's trouble as I turned away in order to contemplate that fresh trouble of my own. Rose, after all, was weak, and he was with her continually—he so clever and rich, so handsome, so capable of winning love, while I—I who loved her as man never loved, was forced to stand out in the cold, bearing all this, and, like some poor wretch battling with the rigour of a snow-storm, to see only at a distance the fires blazing, near which other men could sit enjoying the bright glow of the pine logs piled high on the once familiar hearth.

And yet still I never then quite despaired. I felt strong in myself—felt success might still be on the cards for me. Already I was beginning to be recognised—time had commenced its work, which, though very slow, is very sure, and if I had not got very first rate briefs, at least solicitors, some of them shrewd enough in their generation, were aware of my existence.

People began to speak to me—people I knew,

who, though I recognized them well enough, had hitherto regarded me as a stranger and an outsider.

I had been blest with some small retainers, I was becoming well known in the courts. The woman who kept the stall by the gate which leads from Chancery Lane, away towards Lincoln's-Inn Fields, had learnt to know me; I occasionally received an invitation to dinner from other men than Mr. Sherlock; Dick Tullett, who was even then rising to eminence, meeting me one day in the street, had not disdained to ask me to partake of boiled mutton with him (so his modesty put it) on the following day, and I went and ate the mutton, which turned out to be venison, sent by one of his patrons, and was charmed, as may well be imagined, with Dick and his surroundings.

After the venison business, however, I lacked courage to invite Dick's company to a mutton chop and pints of the best Burton, which hesitation I have reason to believe Dick ascribed to pride on my part, believing I earned a fabulous income on the "Weekly Jupiter," the actual fact being I felt afraid of Dick, who knew nobody under a lord, and talked about wines as if he had been weaned on them. I have tried experiments since upon Dick, and find he knows no more about wines than my youngest daughter, who if I were writing at home at this moment instead of in my chambers, would toddle up to me, and taking the pen out of my hand, say, "You shall write no more, pa," which

mandate I always, since the world is altered and parents now honour their children, dutifully obey.

Time still went on as has been before stated. It is a way time has, though sometimes when very miserable one feels almost inclined to doubt the fact; and summer came again, and another autumn followed, and though I thought I was "getting on" really, yet apparently matters with me remained *in statu quo.*

I had nothing to take in my hand, so to speak, and show Sir Humphrey and Lady Surry. My means were still inadequate to maintain a wife properly, and ere long it seemed probable I should have to assist my father in maintaining his family.

The great brief might come or it might never come—and if it did another might never follow. My own reason was all on their side of the question, but my feeling was all on my own. Had they given me a hope of Rose I felt as though I could have conquered fate—but then in those days when I had a hope of Rose I had not conquered fate—the victory had been quite the other way—alas! for us.

"The Surrys are in London," Joan remarked to me one morning in that autumn, to which allusion has been made, "I saw Rose and her mother driving in the park yesterday, with Mrs. Surry. Rose looked pale and worn."

It was in my chamber this interview took place, and when Joan ceased speaking I made no

reply, only turned over the scattered papers, putting them mechanically in order, one on the top of another.

"What did you say, Tom," asked my sister, after waiting patiently for about a minute.

"I said nothing," I replied.

"Then why did you say nothing?" she retorted. "I tell you Rose—our Rose—is in London, and you stand there like a stock or a stone, answering never a word. Has this not gone on long enough, Tom?" she asked passionately. Ah! Joan, I do not believe that passion was evinced altogether in my interest. "Are you not going to make an effort to see her, to keep her for yourself?"

"I promised——," I was beginning, when Joan interrupted with—

"Then unpromise—you should never have done anything so ridiculous and quixotic as to pledge yourself to adopt any course. Write to Sir Humphrey, and give him fair warning you mean to use every means to win his daughter. The girl is breaking her heart for you. I have no patience with men," my sister finished. "If I were a man, and a girl loved me as Rose loves you, I would have her, spite of all the parents in England."

"No, Joan, you would not," I replied; "not if you loved her; rather, if you felt you had no prospect but poverty, no chance of maintaining her in anything like the comfort to which she had been accustomed, you would say, 'God grant she may forget and leave the burden to be borne by me.'"

"Then why did you ask her to wait for you till Christmas next?"

"Because I was mad," I replied, "because experience had not taught me—because I believed in myself, and thought I was strong enough to accomplish anything by means of my own cleverness. I see now my mistake—I see, without extraneous help, a professional man can do very little to push his way. Oh! Joan," I added, speaking out what had often lately filled my heart, "I wish I had never left the farm, never accepted Mrs. Graham's offer. I used to count the hours till I should get away and begin my new career—but it was all a mistake. I could have done well for myself and all of us, with your help, had I remained there. I should have been near Rose, and in that case——."

"Nothing would ever have changed her," Joan finished, as I paused, "but as matters stand, you have left the field open for her cousin. You know Rose well enough—so long as she had anybody to stand near and protect her, she could be brave as I am, but as things are, how can you expect her to be firm? She is everlastingly with Walter Surry and his mother, and it is a match you may be positive Lady Surry would like, and you have pledged yourself not to write or to see her, and there can be no doubt but that either they are intercepting her letters, or that she is changing, for it is more than six months since I

had even a line from her, she who used to write two or three times a week."

"Joan," I said, "would you have me ask Rose to spend all the best years of her life waiting for a man who may never be able to marry her after all?"

"There is no use in talking to you, Tom," she answered; "I believe, after all, you are fond of that hateful Miss Sherlock. I saw you walking down Piccadilly with her yesterday. Yes, you may well colour; I did see you, though you were too much occupied to notice me. If you lose Rose I shall not pity you one morsel. It would not surprise me any day to see an account of her marriage in the paper."

"It would surprise me greatly," I answered; but even while I spoke my conscience accused me of falsehood.

I knew I should not be surprised—I knew I should have no right to feel so. And yet, spite of this knowledge, I hoped on, believing in my darling's constancy, and only really dreading the coming of that Christmas Eve when I had told her she would understand by my presence or absence how it was to be between us in the future.

And yet what right had I any longer to thrust my wretched prospects between her and fortune? For any one, even for my Rose, Walter Surry, from a pecuniary point of view, was a capital match; further, according to Joan, this paragon had been endowed by Heaven with every gentlemanly

grace and manly virtue. True, he had led Joan astray as regarded his feelings towards her; but I could well understand that, if he loved Rose, he would like Joan for Rose's sake, and comprehend, with his knowledge of the world, that the best way to destroy her attachment for me was to patronise my family, and afford her ample opportunities for contrasting the narrow means of our poor home with the glories of Grayborough.

Afterwards I knew in all this I had made a mistake, and that at the time he was perfectly unconscious I was an object of the slightest interest to Rose, or Rose to me; but it is difficult at any period of one's life to understand that one's actual existence is a matter of the supremest indifference to a great many people on earth, and this is doubly difficult to realise when one first starts on the race, and being new to the course, fancies that every man's eye is watching to note the result.

There is one thing I can honestly say, however—namely, that if I were an object of indifference to Walter Surry, he was by no means an object of indifference to me. I thought of him waking, I dreamed of him sleeping, and always in my dreams he seemed to me mixed up with that Lovell Allen, of whom Rose had spoken so bitterly. Sometimes the one changed into the other—sometimes I confused Lovell Allen's face with that of Walter Surry; but always those two men were associated in my mind together, and have remained so associated ever since.

As Christmas drew near, my nights grew more disturbed, my days more restless; I could attend to nothing properly; the little work I had was neglected; I could not write, I could not read; the very printers' devils I had once been so rejoiced to welcome, whom I had requested with such courtesy to seat themselves in my vestibule whilst I completed an article, and rewarded with numerous sixpences for dropping off to sleep during their stay, were now dismissed summarily and empty, both as regarded copy and gratuities.

When Mr. Sherlock's managing clerk came over with a brief in some trumpery case that was to be tried at the Guildhall, I failed to receive him with those evidences of gratitude which he had come really to regard as his due; and never suspecting the cause of my indifference, he went back and told his employer he thought Mr. Luttrell must be getting on, for he did not seem to care about such small things now.

But in an hour, in a minute, everything was changed—green leaves budded from barren stems, flowers decked the fields—the sun poured his warmest beams into the room where I sat beside my wintry fire.

One day there came a brief—the brief of all others I could have desired. The great case of Aylesbury *v.* Montford and others, which filled the newspapers for weeks, and occupied public attention to an almost unheard of extent, was coming on

for trial, and to my humble room—to my chambers in Staple's Inn, was sent a brief.

The leader on our side was Mr. Serjeant MacNeill, since raised to the peerage, and I was next to him.

Fortune had relented at last, the ball was at my foot, the tide had turned, and might bear my poor tossed bark to wealth and Rose Surry after all.

I never paused to enquire how it had come or why; but, like a giant refreshed, arose and faced once more the life I had but a few moments before thought not worth living—faced it as a man restored after long sickness to health looks out on the world with a new sense of its beauty, with a keener appreciation of its loveliness.

At what age, I wonder, does a man, so long as he has the chance of happiness stretching away before him, cease to be a fool. I was a fool that day when the brief in Aylesbury's case arrived. Already I saw retainers pouring in, and heard myself talking, the observed of all observers; already I prophetically beheld publishers offering me fabulous sums for my next new work; already wealth was mine—and fame.

It has all come since—all my soul then thirsted for—sufficient wealth, comparative fame, briefs more than I desire to see—such celebrity, or shall we rather say notoriety, as is to be won by him who addresses his Lordship and an intelligent and enlightened jury. People great enough in their way, and high up in the social scale, like to see me at their dining tables, while my wife's basket is filled

with "At Homes," and invitations to various excuses for bringing people together and making them uncomfortable. And yet, behold the end, my dear young friends—after all, when you ask me for a story, behold I can find none so near my heart as that of my "First Love," for whose dear sake I gloried in that brief, for whose satisfaction I already mentally won the case, after a magnificent speech following that of Mr. Serjeant MacNeill.

I went to my poor aunt and told her success had come at last, whereupon the dear old creature burst into tears of mingled pride and affection, and told me I was the only thing she had to live for. I then journeyed to Southgate, and carried the good news thither.

Ah! heaven, who on this earth would be lonely, if he could but know all the pleasures his success is capable of carrying to those who can love, but have no power of winning success for themselves. I cannot imagine anything so barren as victory, if the victor have to wear his laurels solitary amongst strangers—if he have no kith nor kin to rejoice with him, to feel their hearts stirred when the thousands clap, and the crowd cheers—when they behold him who is of their lineage, whose blood is identical with their own, bowing the hearts of the men of Israel as the heart of one man.

"There is only one thing wanting," Joan whispered, as she came with me to the door.

"On Christmas-Eve, please God," I answered, and I went exulting out into the night.

But long ere Christmas-Eve it pleased God to stretch my dear father on a bed of sickness, and for days and days his life hung by such a thread that, spite of my love and my longing, I could not leave his side.

He did not, of course, know where my heart was, and while he kept continually asking for Tom when I was out of the room, and holding my hand while I was in it, how could I leave, even to keep faith with her whom I loved better than father, or mother, or brother, or sister, loving each one and all of them no less the while.

But I sent a special messenger down to Old Court with a letter, and instructions to deliver it into Miss Surry's own hands, which he did—only it chanced to be into the hands not of Rose, but of another Miss Surry, who ordinarily resided in Devonshire Place, but who chanced then to be staying on a visit with her brother. This lady, after reading, carried the epistle to Lady Surry, and the pair agreed to keep its contents and its advent a secret from Rose—whom it would only, so they said, unsettle.

Long afterwards we knew this, when in the future we came to compare notes—when Rose, sitting in this very room, told me how she had gone to the church, and watched and waited—waited even in the churchyard after every one else was gone—only to return home disappointed.

And they knew it, those women—knew the travail of her heart for one they had striven to

make her believe unworthy—knew I was constant all the while—knew that then, just as tenderly and truly as when we stood in my father's orchard whispering our vows—I loved Rose, and Rose loved me.

CHAPTER X.

WHAT SUCCESS BROUGHT TO ME.

IT was the second week in the new year before I could get away, that is before my father was pronounced out of danger—and then I really ought not to have left, because I knew every moment of my time should, properly speaking, have been devoted—not to love—but to the great cause of Aylesbury *v.* Montford and others. To rest, however, any longer without seeing Rose, was, I felt, impossible. There had been a period during that weary probation when I turned my thoughts from her, and swore to myself I would forget my madness and my disappointment; but now when hope had returned, when the past was again present, and the dream just capable of fulfilment, how should I longer refrain?

There was a hunger and a thirst on me to behold my darling. I could have cried aloud for delight when I found the early express speeding me onward. I talked to my fellow passengers, I lent one

old gentleman the *Times*,—I gave another a share of my travelling rug. I was amiable even concerning politics, and forbore from thrusting my conservative flag under the eyes of an unmitigated radical, who treated us to a dissertation on the then absorbing question of the day.

What did I care about the frost and snow: I liked them. There was a bracing exhilaration in the air; the wind was crisp and fresh. So much of my life had lately been spent in a sick room, and a sick house, that I felt like a prisoner let loose, while speeding away to Cromingford.

The station was nearly a mile from the village, and of course there were no vehicles of any kind awaiting the arrival of the train; so I left my bag at the station, with direction that it should be forwarded to the "Green Man and Still," by one of the porters, and pursued my way on foot to that unambitious hostelry.

Everywhere the frozen snow lay thick. It sparkled on the leaves of the holly in the hedges; it covered the fields; it clothed the upper portion of each elm bough. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds twittered, and the ground was crisp and firm below my tread; and it seemed to me as though my boyhood, and the hopes and the purposes thereof, had returned, while I walked rapidly towards the village.

Before I reached it, there fell upon my ears the sound of the bells I remembered so well, ringing for some village wedding; and when I came in

sight of the church, I saw that the graveyard was full of idlers, and that on the green were collected knots of persons, who seemed gathered to see the bridal.

"Happy may they be," I thought to myself; but at that very moment I caught sight of three or four carriages drawn up under the lime trees near the church gate, and—why, I know not, I never could tell—my heart gave first a great bound of fear, and then seemed as suddenly to stand still.

"You seem to be very merry at Cromingford to-day, my friend," I said, to an old labourer, whom I passed, and who was standing like the rest, to see the show. How I ever got the words out, I do not know, for my tongue seemed to be cleaving to the roof of my mouth. I was parched like one who had been wandering through some arid desert.

"Yes, sir; it is our young lady's wedding day, and there are to be great doings at the Court to-night, the like of which have never been known in these parts."

"Young lady—Court," I repeated, in my agony.

"Yes, sir, Miss Surry is marrying her cousin; and a bullock is to be roasted whole at Old Court."

I pushed him on one side, and ran on.

Had I reached the church in time I know now I should certainly have forbid the wedding, interrupted the ceremony; but as it was, just as I entered the porch the marriage party were sweeping into the vestry.

I saw people pressing round the bride, kissing,

shaking hands, wishing her all happiness. I saw the bridegroom, tall, stately, exultant. I saw my treasure—mine, shrinking a little from the congratulations—white as her veil, pass to the book, where she signed her name, which was to be the same as wife as it had been as maiden; and then feeling I could not stand without some support, I leaned up against the wall just within the church porch, and waited for her coming.

I did not mean to speak. I only intended that she, faithless, should see me faithful, and I repented me afterwards that I had not fled—I did, oh! Rose, my love.

After a long time, as it seemed to me, they came out, bride and bridegroom first; she just touching his arm; he bending down triumphantly, and looking so proud and so happy that I could have stricken him dead in my jealous hate.

But I shrank back from their sight; if the ground had opened and swallowed me up I should have been glad, but as it refused I drew more and more away from the light to a corner under the organ loft stairs, where no eyes but hers could have beheld me.

Suddenly her face changed, and she dropped his arm. "I see an old friend I must speak to," I heard her say, and next moment the small white-gloved hand clasped mine, and there came to my ear the piteous moan, "Oh! Tom—why did you not come before?"

Then looking in my face like myself she grasped

it. We had both been deceived, both duped—we knew it by intuition then, as we knew it of certainty afterwards.

"We must both try to bear it," she went on. How brave these women, even the tenderest of them, are under the torture—perhaps the tenderer the braver. "We must both try to bear it. Good-bye, Tom, dear!" And the little hand was withdrawn, and I saw her, whom I had carried in my arms—who should have been mine—mine—pass away through the door and down the path—his—

Farther into the darkness I drew back, and when the last of the wedding party had defiled out, I crept after them into the daylight.

I did not attempt to follow them. I only stopped behind a monument and watched *her* returning the greeting of the villagers, while my heart seemed breaking.

I followed her white dress, till she entered her husband's carriage, and I heard the cheer with which the crowd greeted the newly-married couple as they drove back to Old Court.

Then I emerged from my post of observation, and walking along a path which led in a contrary direction, struck off across the fields to walk anywhere away from *her* memory.

The whole aspect of nature seemed changed to me in a moment; it was no longer a bracing, inviting morning to my idea—the earth was covered with a frost, which had blighted flower and beauty—

as in a moment flower and beauty had departed from my life.

It was in the early spring I had last trodden those field paths, unhappy in my prospects indeed, but yet seeing a life before me not destitute of hope; but now, oh! Lord, but now—success had come, and where was she for whom I alone desired success?

Where there had been verdure there lay snow; in lieu of leaf and promise were bare boughs and rotten twigs, while Rose, the only love of my life, could be, even in thought, mine no longer.

And so, thus far, my story is told. So my first love passed away from my sight—the wife of another.

MY LAST LOVE.

MY LAST LOVE.

A SEQUEL.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER HER MARRIAGE.

THROUGHOUT the whole of my professional career it has been a comfort to me to remember that when the great case of Montfort v. Aylmer was lost, as lost it was, I had no share in the disaster.

To this hour I cannot understand why Montfort was beaten, more particularly as when he ultimately carried his cause to the House of Lords, he gained the day.

Trifles, as people regard them, influence verdicts. The state of the foreman's liver—the fact of some pig-headed juror having dined too late and too well the evening preceding—the temper in which another entered his matutinal omnibus, said temper being in-

fluenced by the lateness of breakfast, or a request for cash from his wife—these things, and things such as these, are sufficient occasionally to rule the fortunes of Cæsar, whilst the outer world considers the fault lay either with Cæsar or Cæsar's friends, and censures and chides both accordingly.

Wherefore, the fates having ruled I was to achieve no success in love, I felt glad—when I was capable of feeling glad about anything—that the jade Fortune had not served me the sorry trick of taking not only Rose, but the chances of fame and wealth also.

After all, if a man must wear the willow, it is as well he should stick it in a decent hat.

I think there is a good deal of truth in that well-worn adage concerning love and cards. For my own part I cannot now recall an instance of a man who proved a winner in both. The world of course talks largely about handsome wives, and lovely children, and a princely income, as it talks largely about most things appertaining to its favourite sons and daughters; but I, who have listened to as many confidences as most, know quite well that to the majority of human beings there comes an hour when the devil or luck says, "How will you take it—gold or affection? It is impossible to grasp both—which shall it be?"

Whilst some poor wretches handing the whole of their future into the hands of fate, get nothing back in exchange—for every rule has its exceptions—and there will always be some men and some women with whom nothing shall prosper till the end of this world's volume.

As I was remarking, it has ever been a comfort to me that I had nothing to do with the great case of Montfort v. Aylmer. When it came on, and an intelligent jury decided Aylmer should retain possession of a property to which he had no more title than myself, I was lying in Staple's Inn ill unto death, with my mother and Joan tending me. Everyone of course said it was the shock of seeing Rose another man's wife which brought on the fever, for there is a great deal of that sort of folly believed, but when I grew better I knew differently. It is never so much the shock we receive, as what we do after the shock, that stretches us on a sick bed. Dick takes to brandy probably, and Harry either to starving or dissipation; I, Tom, walked for hours and hours through the snow, which was beginning to thaw, got thoroughly soaked, and then sat in my wet clothes while the night express bore me back to town.

Arrived in town, I thought to avert all chance of illness by a glass of something hot and strong—but the remedy either came too late or was not of the right kind, for after that night there ensues a blank in my memory which has never been thoroughly filled up, even by those obliging friends who subsequently informed me I was delirious for some days, and talked a great deal of nonsense; a feat often performed, I have since had occasion to remark, by people in the enjoyment of thoroughly sound health.

The first evidence of having recovered my senses which I gave was trying to rise and dress, in order

to assist in the discomfiture of Aylmer; but as I fainted in this endeavour, and as, moreover, the jury were deliberating on their verdict at that very time, I made no subsequent attempt to appear in the case.

By slow degrees I realized that weeks had gone by whilst I lay unconscious of their passage, that Rose's honeymoon must be over, that as things rush on now-a-days, my trouble was an old one, that my former life with its hopes, its fantasies, its fears, its struggles, was at an end, and that if I were to do any good for myself or others in the future life, which I could not help living, I must try to forget everything connected with that past existence—even the sound of the busy mill wheel and the still beauty of the woods through which, when the white flowers of the wild anemone carpeted them, Rose and I wandered hand in hand together.

My mistress was gone—and I knew that if I searched the wide world through I should never find another love, that could be my love, just as she had been—but after all I whispered to myself, when at length I felt strong enough to take courage and look out over the days that had still to be gone through, "Love is not all—it is not everything."

And so far I was right—but ah! friends, I know now love is a great deal. Nevertheless, whether the day be cheered by sunshine or darkened by clouds, it has to be got through, and it is as well to accept whatever sort of weather God send with decent propriety.

My day had opened with the loss of Rose—and

what a loss that was I may never hope to tell; but once I was strong enough to consider the position, I determined not to let my sorrow master me.

There were various ways in which I could have shown my regret and evinced the grief I experienced. For example, I might have enlisted; for some inscrutable reason men have been known ere now to adopt this mode of comfort; I could have cut my throat, and so contributed many paragraphs to the literature of the country—further, it was competent for me to try whether strong waters might not produce the same effect as those of Lethe; or to shut myself up like persons I had then read of, and whose duplicates I have since known; or to plunge into what people vaguely term a vortex of dissipation; or to indulge in unlimited tobacco, accompanied by unlimited beer—the means required for obtaining such consolation not being excessive. But as neither enlisting, nor suicide, nor intemperance, nor eccentricity, was likely to give me Rose, and as further I had parents to assist, and brothers and sisters to push on in the world, I thought it best to continue in the course I had begun, and to proceed along the road I was previously travelling—only without Rose.

Only! well—well—in every life there is its "but," and its "if," and its "only."

It was in the cottage near Southgate I fully regained my strength, for when once I could bear the jolting, my mother and Joan moved me there. Never shall I forget the delicious languor—the luxu-

rious idleness of the days and weeks which followed. Although at first I could scarcely endure to look upon the face of Nature, by reason of the memories she recalled, yet when she came to me as she did, after a time, beautiful as ever, dressed in her robes of richest green, with flowers in her hands, and buds in her hair, with the lovely tints of spring on her face, and smiles playing on her lips, I yielded myself to the seductions of old, and lay on the green sward, blessing the bright May time, while the wandering breezes scented with hawthorn, and the delicate fragrance of the wild dog roses kissed my forehead and caressed my cheeks.

I got well there—slowly but surely I stole back to health, and then in the glad summer weather what walks Joan and the children and I had together!

There is not an inch of all that neighbourhood I could not traverse blindfold at this moment, unless indeed it might be the country near Colney Hatch and Wood Green where I am told a town has sprung up; where, in place of blackberries, there are plantations of bricks and mortar, and instead of common land little suburban houses with a patch of garden in front, protected from the tread of profane feet by iron railings, all of one pattern, and all painted one colour.

But those winding lanes, those unexpected field paths, shall I ever forget their peaceful beauty? I am old now, and the past may return to me no more; but yet as I write there comes back a not unpleasant memory—nothing more, alas!—of the

strength I possessed when we used to pace under the arching trees of a certain lane leading off to Berry Street, or when in a borrowed phaeton I was wont to drive Joan round by Chingford church, the old church I mean, and along to the Forest, by roads, the very thought of which touches something in my heart, the exact nature of which I shall never be able to define, unless in another world we are as capable of describing our feelings as we are of realizing them in this.

It was during that long holiday also, that I first fully comprehended the treasure God had given us all in Joan. If the little cottage were a very bower of prettiness, it was to Joan it owed its beauty. Under her the younger fry worked with a will. It was very funny to hear Joan talk to them as though they had all emigrated to Australia, and were merely in a strange land, settlers to whom nothing they had to do ought to come amiss. Two of the boys were already in situations, and after their morals and comforts the old lady in Queen Anne Street was supposed to look with anxious attention for six days out of the seven; but once the seventh day came, or rather the evening of the seventh, it might have made an old man young again to hear the voices of those boys as they went about the cottage and the farm, shouting to the smaller fry and whistling to the dogs, and halloing with all the mighty power of their strong lungs.

I thought with Rose the whole happiness of my life had evaporated, leaving behind it nothing save

what was stale, flat, and unprofitable; but I know now that though my love was gone, my capability for enjoyment was left, and that although I had my moods and tenses of deep depression and profound melancholy, still I enjoyed that summer very fairly.

For one thing I had not yet quite realized, what all the days of my life without Rose meant—for another, though I beheld her Walter Surry's wife, I had not entirely grasped the fact that I could never again have either part or lot in her. There is nothing so difficult to believe as a certainty, till we have lived long enough to feel it is a certainty, and not a delusion.

For example, who that has lost any loved object by means of death, ever, even in the first agony of grief, grasps just what it all means then, all it must mean in the future? Say a child has passed to the eternal shores, do you suppose father or mother quite understands the void that will be left? The tiny hands are still, the pattering feet quiet, the prattling tongue mute, the place it occupied empty, but the knowledge of all this comes happily by degrees, just as when a man's wife dies, he scarcely at first comprehends how keenly he may subsequently feel her loss, say for instance in the matter of buttons.

And in those days when I walked round Enfield Chase, and mooned about Winchmore Hill, when I became acquainted with grassy lanes, where the convolvulus climbed and the brambles trailed, wh[illegible]

I crossed every ford, and knew every field path, thorough knowledge had not come to me of how desolate a thing life—even a successful life—might prove without Rose.

Vaguely, I imagine, there had sprung up a hope in my heart, that if I worked hard and made a name, Rose might still be mine. As it is a simple impossibility ever to persuade a disinherited man that a dozen lives will not fall in, and the property ultimately revert to him, so I was wont to picture plague, pestilence, and famine let loose, in order that Walter Surry might be removed from the earth, and I get mine own again.

He hunts, I thought, and men have often been killed by taking an awkward leap with an awkward horse; he shoots, it may be he will meet his end in one of his own preserves: he has a yacht, it may go to the bottom: he drives fast and furiously, some day perchance his fiery steeds may carry him to his death. Ideas such as these floated through my mind, whilst it never occurred to me that death might develope a fancy for me, or fall in love to more purpose than I had done with Rose—my Rose no longer.

It was not right, I knew, to picture Walter Surry dead, his wife a widow; and yet I imagine thoughts of the possibilities I have hinted at, broke the force of my fall. I was not cast out of the seventh heaven of my fool's paradise, with never a straw to grasp at, and when I did reach the earth, paradise was so far away, and the realities of existence so urgently

claiming attention, that I was fain to regard the story of "My First Love," which has been already told, as a sort of fairy tale that could never have had any tangible connection with my prosaic life.

She was gone. As one wakes in the morning, to find the fairest dream vanish with the first touch of light, so I awoke by degrees to a comprehension that Rose and I were parted for ever—that she could no more be my love than the dream could be dreamt over again, or the vision beheld a second time.

It seems to me only yesterday that I first saw her driving in the Park with her husband,—looking lovely, of course, and happy also.

I drew back behind a tree, so that her eyes might not rest on me, and when their carriage had passed, I walked off in an opposite direction, feeling as though I had received a stab, and were bleeding internally.

But time went by, and I grew accustomed to that spectacle; aye, even when I saw her fondling her boy—*his* son, I can honestly say my heart held a blessing for them both, though at the moment the waters of my life seemed bitter to me as those of Marah.

But I anticipate, and this is a fault in story-telling, critics say—which is likely true, since it would be expecting too much to suppose they should ever read a tale with sufficient attention to discriminate between the actual present and the indicated future.

CHAPTER II.

I PROPOSE.

SO I went back to my chambers, my law books, and after a time to my writing. For a while it pleased me to put thoughts on paper, to the end that Rose might read them; but soon—recollecting what a little goose she had always been, and how she required some one beside her to explain the meaning of the simplest ideas, to translate as it might be the hard words of a foreign tongue into commonplace English, to convert the guineas of great minds into the more familiar shillings and pence of ordinary exchange,—I gave up walking on stilts, well knowing Rose would only wonder what I could be doing up there, and finally began to write for that for which sooner or later all men and all women do write,—namely, money.

I needed money both personally and for the sake of my family. What my father had saved out of the wreck of his fortunes was almost exhausted, and though it is a hard thing for a man to contemplate

supporting father and mother, brothers and sisters, still it was just then the work lying to my hand, and I took it accordingly.

The taste which first leaves a parent chargeable to the parish, and then refuses to pay the parish for keeping him, has never seemed to me exactly good; and although I am aware there are diversities of opinion on this point, and that I have been often called a fool for my pains even by the wife of my bosom, still I venture diffidently to state, that I do not think I am anything the poorer now because, to the best of my limited ability, I helped to keep a roof over the heads of my father and mother, and to enable the younger children to provide for themselves. Some of the latter have done well and some ill, as must always be the case in large families. We have ne'er-do-wells amongst our girls' husbands, and wasters amongst our boys, but there is no grave —for we have our dead — which I need avoid passing by reason of remembered neglect or coldness.

The worst trial we had amongst them all was Stephen, but he died with his head on Joan's shoulder, and his hand clasping mine. I did my best for them all, and though sometimes I think that best might have been better, had I either not married at all or married differently—still I cannot be quite sure—and as I did marry my wife there can now be no earthly use in speculating upon the question.

The way I came to marry her was, that it seemed

to be expected of me. People may say this is no valid reason for taking a wife — but thousands of men marry for no other. There is a great deal of talk about love at the present time—more than there used to be in the days when youths and maidens had better opportunities of seeing one another, and grew fonder accordingly—but looking round on my acquaintances and observing men's wives. I can come to no other conclusion than that partners for life are selected much after the fashion in which a house is taken.

For some reason or other a wife is desired, and if a man cannot find just what he wants or what suits him, or that somebody else steps in and takes it over his head, he puts up with what he can get. And perhaps in time the wife being his own he comes to like her—or, perhaps, being his own he grows to dislike her—anyhow the choice has been made and the woman taken, and then there being no help for it, when we see a poor wretch trying vainly to make the best of a bad bargain, we insist with a bitter irony that he married for love.

I did not at any rate—and yet society has always been good enough to suppose so—to think me such a fool in fact as to imagine had I married for love I should not have married something very different. There are people who even now admire Mrs. Luttrell — vastly — she is younger than I, and has worn considerably better. Some ten years ago her portrait appeared on the Academy walls, and she really looked handsomer then than I had ever

thought her before, which might certainly be owing to the artist's kindness. That portrait now hangs on one side of our dining-room mantelpiece, and always seems looking round into the other room in search of another portrait, which shall never be painted, that of your humble servant; and I will say it is a tolerably faithful likeness of a lady most men might be proud of calling wife.

She is what is generally known as a "fine woman," (I wonder men will use the phrase or women tolerate it) large, with a certain stateliness of carriage and *empressement* of manner. Girls, looking at her with a certain awe, think her nevertheless delightful; but boys, amongst whom the bump of reverence is not so largely developed as is the case with their sisters, never seem to feel quite at ease in her presence.

During the whole of our married life her prudence and discretion have been beyond all praise. Admired, she has yet not flirted, and I have never lost five minutes of my natural rest owing to any jealous misgivings concerning her. Further, she has borne me sons and daughters—two of the former and three of the latter—and has ruled my household, if not—well, shall we say economically—at least with a due regard to what the world expected from people in our position. Perhaps, indeed, with an over regard, but it would be ungenerous to carp at trifles, or to blame a lady for keeping up with the pace of the times in which her lot has been cast.

With one exception also, we have never quarrelled. We have been admirably polite and discreetly fond; all things therefore considered, as marriages go, I did not marry amiss, but it would be folly to say it was a love match.

No. I considered Miss Sherlock a good, handsome, young lady, who made herself immensely agreeable to me, and whose father, mother, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, friends, acquaintances, and self, thought I ought to propose for her. Which after much delay and consideration, and many doubts as to my own prudence, I did.

We will pause here for a moment if you please, dear reader, and argue this matter a little out. We can do so with perfect impunity, since my wife is not aware I am the author of this true tale, and if she were she would not read it. Years ago, indeed, she used to devour every line I wrote, but that was in the days when she had an object to gain by such unwonted mental exercise, and having gained her object, she is little likely to retraverse the means used to compass it.

I had doubts as to my prudence, if you remember; those doubts are now certainties. Better have waited—better have murmured no word of love till something like the old feeling stirred within me again. It may be—God knows I have never seen her—that somewhere on the world's wide surface I might have met another Rose, whom I could have gathered and won.

I have a fancy that a man's first chance is not

necessarily his last, and this idea, though unwarranted by my own experience, has yet received considerable confirmation from the experience of others.

Women tell me that they were first wooed because they recalled some long ago memory. Men say they chose because there was a tone, a look, a gesture, a smile which reminded them of the dream love departed. If I went wooing again -- which Heaven forbid—I do not think I should mention to Grace the charm I find in her golden tresses is their resemblance to those which a quarter of a century ago constituted the chief beauty of Maud; yet such confidences are vouchsafed to the beloved objects, and as a rule during courtship they do not resent it; the words uttered and the remarks made in the Hades of Matrimony, it is impossible to conjecture, for from that bourne no traveller returns; the secrets of that Afterwards are never revealed save in the Divorce Court—and there but imperfectly.

My impression, however, is, that if the man be wise he consigns Maud's memory to oblivion when he weds Grace—but of course I cannot tell.

All I do know is, that even had Miss Sherlock resembled Rose I should have maintained a discreet silence on the subject. But she did not resemble her in the least.

And this it seems to me now was just my mistake. Given that I married at all, I should have married some one like Rose, whom I could have loved, first for the old love's sake, and afterwards

drawn closer and closer to my heart for her own. A man's first love is his ideal love, and the real should always come as near the ideal as may be.

Sometimes—mine has been a lonely life, mentally I mean most part of it—sometimes when I am walking along the streets, or sitting here in my chambers, or indulging—slippers on my feet and the "Times" ready to my hand—in that mild cigar against which Mrs. Luttrell inveighs as is the fashion of ladies after marriage, I wonder whether there be not in some remote district, or wasting her sweetness in the populous solitude of a London street, a second Rose whose life might have been all the happier had we met and married, whose fragrance would have been precious to me, whom I could have tended with loving care, who would have proved the blessing of my life to me, who could have supplied just that something my existence has always lacked, who would have seemed the dear house angel, for whose fluttering dress and soft clinging arms and gentle caresses my soul has longed in the house of her earthly bondage.

And this feeling does not arise from any sort of conceit, or over-weening idea of my own capacity for making a woman happy. It is just that I think there must be some place—a heart now broken, possibly, that would have understood the workings of mine—a woman who might under different circumstances have glided to my vacant hearth, and kindled there a fire which should not have been extinguished till my pulses were stilled for ever· whilst

I in my turn could have filled a void in her life, shielded her, sheltered her, kept her safe within my arms from sorrow and sin, from trouble and regret.

She may have, or may not have had an existence, this second Rose, but it has never fallen to my lot to behold her; thank God.

Being married, I say this out of the depth of my gratitude, for had we met, there would then have begun one of those struggles from which let a man flee never so soon, never so far, he is sure to come forth worsted. As it is, I can truthfully declare I know no woman I like in the least degree better than my wife. Save once she never had any reason to complain of any one stepping between us and stealing away my affections, and on that occasion she mistook the position as ladies unblessed by a real grievance are often apt to do.

"I have been the best of husbands," so Mrs. Sherlock always kindly informs me, when her nature is softened and her heart opened by that Christmas-cheer—which fortunately for her digestion comes but once a year—"I cannot tell you how grateful I feel to God for having been so good to—"

Whereat I step back guiltily, feeling that from my point of view, I have not been a good husband, and that God, Whose blessing the old lady invokes as usual when we part after the festive meeting, which always takes place at Mr. Sherlock's house on the 25th of December—knows it.

They think I have done my best—done more, perhaps, than most—but conscience fails for a few

hours to be quieted, nevertheless. I strive to think I have given my wife all she wanted, all she cared for, or could understand; but, knowing with what a capacity for domestic happiness Heaven gifted me, spite of the cold, cheerless, unsatisfactory life I have led, I turn away from my own sophistry appalled at the bare idea of a flower which never longed for the sunbeams to fall on it; of a human being who should be quite content to pass through the world without craving for the fulness of bliss that can be contained only in one sentence — "I love—I am beloved."

It is quite in vain I tell myself she knows no better, for at all events I should have tried to teach her—I, whose wooing was of the calmest description, and who had won her consent long before I thought it worth my while to ask for it.

How she, or any woman, could ever have been satisfied with such love-making by such a lover baffles my comprehension, but then Catherine Sherlock had no knowledge of that sweet folly in which Rose and I indulged when we strolled through fields yellow with buttercups, or stood idly by the rippling river. First a London nursery, then a schoolroom presided over by a strict governess, kept duly up to the mark by a still stricter mother; then a finishing seminary, then London parties, London acquaintances, London amusements—the usual sort of life led by girls of her rank, and also of a much higher rank in London—that was her experience; never a child—never a girl—she, I will be bound,

had always from her youth upwards behaved herself as a "young lady" should.

She would have delighted the heart of Lady Surry, and yet I am much mistaken if when her own mother looked upon the work of her hands, she felt quite satisfied with it. Mrs. Sherlock's work never satisfied me; so, perhaps, I may be considered slightly prejudiced in the matter.

Speaking from experience, I should say, there is no house which a man about to marry, or likely ever to be in a position to marry, should shun like that inhabited by Pater-familias blessed with a family of handsome grown and growing up daughters. With one daughter the net is spread in sight of the bird, but with several he is lured on with successive crumbs, until lo! a constraining hand is felt, and he understands the moment of his capture has arrived.

For me I walked into the snare with my eyes wide open. I said to myself no woman should ever hear a word of love from me again, and feeling myself so utterly heart-whole, or rather utterly heart-wrecked, I gradually dropped into my old relations with the Sherlock family; dined with them on Sundays occasionally, dropped in frequently, "when passing," in the evenings; escorted the "girls" and their mamma to flower-shows; got boxes for the opera, and duly appeared there once more dancing attendance on the Sherlocks. I cannot, looking back upon the whole business, now imagine what possessed me to be so foolish. I cannot

conceive why I went to the Sherlocks, unless, indeed, it might be that having all my life been accustomed to female society, I welcomed this sort of companionship when a better was beyond my reach.

There is something charming to a particular class of mind about the mere chatter of a lot of women; something in the grace and refinement of calm home life irresistible to men of a certain nature.

After my hard work—for I did work hard even in those days, though not with that persistent labour which success has since necessitated — the sight of the girls in their pretty muslin dresses; the perfume of the flowers in the drawing-room, and the sound of their grand piano, on which Julia, the youngest, was no mean performer; the talk about trifles ; about the little odds and ends that make up the sum and substance of a fortunate woman's life; all those things, I say, were pleasant to me; they were the vague reflex of a home I had left; the dim realization of an ideal home I was never destined to possess; and, as we love the sound of a familiar air, even though it be sung by an indifferent performer, so this similitude, unsatisfactory as it might be, of an imaginary Paradise, lured me on, lured me from my dull chambers to the abode of Mr. Sherlock, where, sooth to say, my welcome was ever of the most cordial description.

As has been previously intimated, Mr. Sherlock formed a high estimate of my chances of success at a very early period of our acquaintance, and assuredly it was not his fault that I failed to command fortune at an earlier period of this story

A shrewd individual, and blessed with so many daughters that he could afford to bestow them without sorrow on likely husbands more easily than dower them with sufficient wealth to ensure their being able possessed of a good competence to roam through life in maiden meditation, fancy free, he looked on every man he met with a sort of double interest.

The new comer might be a possible lover or a probable client. Supposing him unlikely to become the last, Mr. Sherlock was willing to take into consideration his means of sustaining the first character; and, given that he could not be the first, Mr. Sherlock had no objection to entertaining him well, in faith that after many days his bread should be found again.

If a new acquaintance seemed able and willing to play both characters, then, of course, Mr. Sherlock opened his arms to him all the more readily; but prizes of this description are not frequently landed on the matrimonial shore, and none of the Misses Sherlock married quite as in my opinion they ought to have done, considering the numerous "advantages," social, educational, and moral, which they had enjoyed.

In other words, calculating the amount of capital sunk on them, I think the young ladies did not return a fair amount of interest; but, after all, there is three per cent. certain, and an hundred per cent. risky; wherefore, perhaps, Mr. Sherlock's daughters were just as safe on their comparatively limited in-

comes as they might have been had they shot up matrimonially like rockets, only to the end that they might come down again like sticks.

All this long digression is intended to explain how it happened that Mr. and Mrs. Sherlock took kindly to me, and made no sort of objection when in due time, Miss Sherlock took more kindly still. Neither were they, after the fashion of the parents mentioned in Alan-a-Dale, steel and stone when, after much exercise of spirit, I asked them to make me the happiest man in England.

They never "lifted the latch, and bade me begone." They only said they gave dear Catherine to me in the fullest confidence. I have often wished since their faith had been less, or my good qualities not so apparent.

Not unwarned, either, did I walk into the noose matrimonial; on the contrary, my mother frequently trusted that I would not marry or engage myself precipitately. She did not approve of early marriages unless suitable in *every* respect; she thought a rising man should wait until he attained a certain position before choosing, and so forth; while Joan openly hoped I never would make that odious Miss Sherlock her sister-in-law.

As for the old lady in Queen Anne Street, she rather encouraged the idea. Now her money was gone, she felt thankful for such slight attentions as the Sherlocks considerately shewed her; further, other acquaintances having cooled and dropped off, she delighted in the Sherlocks' visits, which broke

the monotony of her life, and brought to her very arm-chair news and gossip which she could by no other manner of means have contrived to hear.

"It will be a very good match for you indeed," Mrs. Graham was wont to remark, and when I replied—

"I have no intention of marrying at all," she shook her head gravely, and said "she trusted I did not mean to wear the willow all my life for the sake of a girl who evidently had not cared two-pence about me." Further, she expressed her belief that if I did not marry Miss Sherlock, I ought to marry her; and that if I had not proposed for her, or did not propose soon, those consequences which were sure to ensue would be fully deserved by me.

To what consequences Mrs. Graham referred I have not to this moment an idea; but still, these vague hints of something fearful looming in the future filled me with a terrible alarm — all the greater, perhaps, by reason of its very vagueness.

Fact is, I had long been drifting down that river which falls into the matrimonial sea—drifting too, without excuse, merely because I was too cowardly and too irresolute to take oar and pull back against the stream.

When I thought of Mrs. Sherlock's black looks, and the "explanation" on which Mr. Sherlock would naturally insist—when I considered the time Miss Sherlock had wasted upon my unworthy self, and reflected about the strictures of her friends, who would be sure to say, and justly, that I had used her shamefully—retreat seemed impossible.

I was not afraid of a "breach of promise." Even had such cases been as common then as they are now, Mr. Sherlock was much too wise a man and considerate a father to risk damaging his daughter's future by any proceedings of that nature; but I was afraid I had so far committed myself, that nothing remained save for me to proceed further, and commit myself yet more.

That the Sherlocks expected me to propose, was patent to the meanest comprehension. Often her sisters—evidently instructed so to do—left us alone together, and there are no more fearful memories in my life than that of those half-hours when Catherine and I talked on indifferent subjects—she momentarily anticipating the coming of my request, and I knowing she was waiting for it.

Those sisters—once more, young man, strong in your youth and your vanity, avoid a house where there are daughters—were as so many nails in my coffin. Whenever one seemed loose, they struck it on the head, and drove it home. Without their help, Catherine Sherlock had never become my wife—with it, I am her most devoted husband.

At last I did it; I felt happier after, for the deed was accomplished—the matter off my mind. And the time and the manner was as follows:—

Finding their house in Upper Malcolm Street too small ostensibly for their family—but, really, too small for the enlarging views of that family—Mr. Sherlock took a house in Huntingdon Square. Perhaps, reader, you may chance to know it, but, for

the benefit of those who do not, I will state that it lies in what is now the North Western District of London—very West of North indeed; that it is out of the way of every place; that even at this present hour it is fairly fashionable, and altogether, and in all respects, it was eminently unsuitable for a professional man blessed with a very certain number of girls, whose fortunes were entirely dependent on his exertions.

However, Mr. Sherlock took the house, and Mrs. Sherlock gave a large party in honour of their entering into possession, to which I was duly bidden.

Never had Catherine looked to such advantage. Amongst a number of pretty girls, she was the prettiest—decidedly the *belle* of the room. So I heard people observing as we whirled round to the music of one of Schubert's waltzes.

"What a handsome couple!" "Engaged," "When is it to be?" These sentences were spoken in loud whispers, and, after I had led Miss Sherlock to a seat, one gentleman, an old attorney, whose good-will I was anxious to conciliate, seized me by the hand, and asked if he might congratulate me?

"Not yet," I answered; "but I hope some day." And then I determined to make the plunge that night, and, as every one expected me to propose, fulfil these natural anticipations.

But for the ball dress, and the lights, and the music, and the dancing, and the champagne—I do not think I could have done it after all; but she

looked so soft and graceful, and feminine, in her skirts, and puffings, and ribbons, and flowers, that for the time the other figure, which rarely left me, vanished away, and I saw nothing but a beautiful woman, who loved me as much as she could love anything, and who, in answer to my whispered "Catherine," blushed crimson, but never withdrew her hand.

We were standing at the moment in a conservatory, the plants in which formed a sort of screen between us and the ballroom.

I can see it all now—Catherine, for the first time, timid, and a little shrinking—the dancers going as fast as their legs could carry them, whilst the band played "The Spirit of the Ball." I see the aloes and the orange-trees, through the branches of which there peeps for a moment the half-angry face of a girl, between whom and myself there have been certain small flirtations on occasions like the present. I loosen Catherine's hand, and lay mine on my heart to induce the girl to think I had been only playing at love-making; then the face vanishes, and I draw near again, and say, "We were watched, Catherine —I may call you so, may I not?"

She says nothing, for this is not a proposal, and the young lady has been well trained, so I proceed to extremities, and ask if some day she will let me call her "wife?" which being definite enough in all conscience, she murmurs "yes," and "papa."

And thus I became engaged, for it is needless to remark that "papa," whose consent I asked before

leaving the house, was more than willing, while mamma and the girls—not including Catherine—kissed me at parting; but the next day I went into the park, and stood in a retired place till I saw Walter Surry's carriage pass.

Then I said to myself, "Good-bye, dear love—good-bye, bright dream," and turned me to the new life, into which I swore no thought of Rose Surry should enter.

CHAPTER III.

THE "HAPPIEST DAY OF MY LIFE."

WE were not married so soon as I could have wished, for Mr. Sherlock thought I had better get a little "before the world" ere taking unto myself a wife, and it is only a just testimony to the admirable prudence and wisdom of my *fiancée*, to add that she thought so too.

Now, being "before the world" meant, in Mr. Sherlock's dictionary, a certain sum of money so invested as to be easily got at if need arose, say at profitable interest in the three per cents.; a policy of assurance, and a well-furnished house, freehold if possible, if not leasehold at a nominal rent; but in consideration of the fact that I had still my way to push, and had every prospect of pushing it to some purpose, he consented to waive the three per cents. and freehold business, and only stipulated that I should insure my life in some sound office, approved by him, and provide a comfortable home for Catherine before I married her.

When a man chances to be the overworked father of many daughters, it is natural that he should dread anyone of them coming home empty-handed in the event of widowhood; and had Catherine been called upon in the early days of our married life to weep beside my death-bed, as I doubt not she would have done most decorously, I can fancy comfort mingling with her grief at thought of that three thousand pounds, on which the poor dear fellow had only paid one premium.

Whether before the day of his marriage, it is exactly pleasant that a man shall be compelled to contemplate as an imminent possibility the day of his death, is a question on which I do not now propose to enter. For my own part, I have always believed that fathers-in-law elect receive a commission from the insurance companies, and that in this way, inverting Shakespeare, the prospective funeral meats furnish forth the present bridal feast; but then as my wife says, I am peculiar, which may well be, though Heaven knows I do not think I am one half so peculiar as the men and the women amongst whom my lot is cast.

Further, she says I was always peculiar, which also may well be, seeing I insured my life in the interests of—furnished a house to please the tastes of —and finally married a woman for whom I can honestly declare I cared no more, or rather less, than I do for the lady who may read this paragraph, since the latter does me the honour to scan what I have written, while my wife decidedly prefers the

works of those popular authors whom she knows only by repute.

No man, somebody says, is a hero to his *valet de chambre*. I am sure no writer is to his home circle, save by virtue of the pounds, shillings and pence his writings produce.

"How much are you to have for that, dear?" says Fond Affection, sitting by the hearth; and when you inform her, she replies, evidently liking the sum, but considering it beyond your deserts,—

"I wish I could write;" implying thereby that if she merely possessed your foolish knack of authorship she could produce something worth buying.

"I wish you could," says the unfortunate hack in answer, thinking at the same time if she were able to indite anything besides an ungrammatical letter, she would understand what weary work it all is, what tiring, unsatisfactory, never-ending, always beginning work it seems, once the glamour is removed, and the illusory mist of distance dispelled, and a man comes to understand the exact meaning of the word author, as learnt from long and close personal experience with it.

But I wander away from the Life Policy, which—after making various statements about my father and mother, and brothers and sisters, and being kneaded and pounded all over by a terrible man with knuckles like the pebbles wherewith David slew Goliath, who wormed the secret of my engagement out of me, and then grew maddeningly facetious over it—was duly effected.

For over twenty years I have paid that premium, and grumbled over doing so.

"But then you might have died," says the secretary, with whom I have the honour of being acquainted.

"But I haven't," I suggest.

"Are you sorry?" he asks.

"Well, upon the whole, 'yes.' I think I should like to have had my innings out of something, even an insurance office."

"Ah! Mr. Luttrell, just the same as ever," he remarks.

"Just the same," I agree, and walk out of the office, muttering to myself, however, "Just the same Luttrell circumstances made me, but not the Luttrell I should have been, taking Rose to wife without any of these accursed preliminaries."

That is the difference, you perceive, between marrying one's first love, and forming a matrimonial alliance with one's second.

The first is apple blossom and moonshine—murmuring streams and the sweetest ballad in the world, as it seemed then, as it seems still to memory. The second is a carpet warehouse—wholesale if possible—one of Collard's pianos, procured through a professional friend at ostensibly trade prices; a house Lord So-and-So would have taken had there only been sufficient accommodation for his domestics, and the means of giving one party at least every season so thronged, that numbers were unable to ascend the staircase. All this Catherine has com-

passed, and I can only hope she is satisfied with it. I am not quite; but then, as the treasure of my heart remarks, she does not know what would satisfy me.

Nor do I—though, perhaps, looking back I have a fancy what might have once—but then, who can tell?

Better, possibly, for me and my darling that we separated while the dew still trembled on the flowers. I might not have made her so happy as I would. And sometimes, sitting here alone, I think that if the sorrow I can remember stamped upon her face, the tears I have seen her shed, had been caused by any act of mine, I could not bear the curse of life, but just end it with as little unnecessary pain to my family and myself as might be.

But I was to forget Rose, or at least to cease dreaming about, and speaking of her; both of which feats I might have performed now easily, had Mr. Sherlock permitted me to marry earlier and with less fuss concerning ways and means. As it chanced, the contrast between the things Catherine considered essentials, and the modest contentment of Sir Humphrey Surry's daughter, kept the old sore open. I felt, by reason of the amount of outfit required, that I was about taking a journey into a very strange and inhospitable land, the ways of which were not my ways, the inhabitants of which believed not in such matters as love and pure simplicity, but worshipped rather society and Mrs. Grundy, and were incredulous concerning happiness that rented a

house at a lower sum than the social trade union had fixed on as the smallest a gentleman might pay.

Nevertheless, I never swerved in my fidelity to Miss Sherlock. Never once did a thought of selling off my poor worldly effects, paying my few debts, taking my passage to America, and placing the Atlantic between me and my charmer, cross my mind.

I meant to marry, and to push my way up, for the sake of myself and my family. I had not then drunk my drop of the cup of worldly prosperity, and the draught seemed desirable. Unable to compass love and fame, I resolved at least to grasp the latter.

Those who had a right to be most interested in my future happiness were satisfied with my choice.

"It was a good thing on the whole," my mother said at last; while my father remarked—

"Perhaps it was as well, Tom, Rosie did marry her cousin. She would never have made a wife for a poor man."

"It is the most sensible piece of work you ever did," declared Mrs. Graham, "and I am proud of you, Tom Luttrell." Whilst nothing could exceed the affectionate demonstrations of Mrs. Sherlock and the girls, or the kind interest Mr. Sherlock took in me and my affairs.

Only Joan did not like it.

"You are certain, Tom, you have not been in too great a hurry," she asked, as we walked together up

and down the little plot of garden ground which the Southgate Cottage boasted.

Then I replied, a little sharply—

"Joan, I have asked Miss Sherlock to be my wife, and that is the same as if she were already my wife; so you must never say anything like that again. Do you understand ?"

Whereupon Joan sighed, and answered softly—

"Yes, I think I understand better even than you."

"I want to be settled," I said, reading her thought and resenting it. "I shall be glad when Mr. Sherlock gives his consent to my immediate marriage."

But Joan did not answer this time. She only remained aggravatingly silent, offering up, I imagine, a solemn petition that Mr. Sherlock might never give his consent, and that I might never marry Miss Sherlock.

But the petition was not granted. In due time I had saved enough to furnish a house, which Mrs. Sherlock approved, from garret to cellar, even in matters which it then seemed to my bachelor ignorance premature to consider; but she was wise in her generation, and I am bound to say her foresight in the matter of our accommodation was justified by results.

I had found a house then, built, so it seemed, to meet every exigency of our possible future. Catherine selected the furniture —I should advise any man about to marry to insist on the young lady doing so as she cannot in that case well find fault with it

afterwards—and I think she and her mamma bought everything, down to a dozen skewers, which could be needed in an establishment. The life insurance, as hath been already stated, was duly effected. I had held some good briefs, and there appeared every prospect of more following; in fact, I was at length, even from Mr. Sherlock's amended point of view, in a position to marry, and accordingly the day was fixed, and Catherine's wedding-dress made.

It was of white satin, and did not become her. It requires a peculiar woman to stand white satin. Even Rose would have found it a trial, but then I should have chosen her dress, or influenced it no doubt, whilst Miss Sherlock, influenced solely by herself, selected hers without the slightest reference to anybody.

Perhaps, as a professional advertisement—perhaps, because he was overjoyed to remember that a man had at length been found to marry one of his daughters—perhaps, because, having that three thousand pounds always in his memory, he knew it was about the last thing he would ever be called on to do for her, Mr. Sherlock resolved that the nuptials of my Catherine should be on a scale of magnificence undreamed of hitherto in Huntingdon Square.

To describe the preparations which were made in Mr. Sherlock's house, at Mr. Sherlock's expense, in anticipation of the wedding, would be utterly beyond my ability. The whole of the inhabitants of the Square were indeed kept on the *qui vive* for some weeks previous to the ceremony. Now it was

the florist come in a light van to take his orders, now the confectioner, now the individual who was to find rout seats for the evening ball, further, large band-boxes, and young women of the millinery persuasion being followers of fashion and latest bonnet novelty, prevailed in the hall, whilst in the drawing-room I heard of nothing save tulle and tarletan, silks and laces.

My adored one was accompanied to the altar by twelve bridesmaids, six of whom were arrayed in pink and white, and six in blue and white, a device of Maud's, who thereby secured to herself by some means the privilege—not hard to wrest—of paying for the attire of herself and sisters. Since those days, I have some reason to believe their flowing robes were paid for also by Mr. Sherlock; but as Mrs. Sherlock never found the matrimonial purse-strings too much relaxed for her benefit, we may forgive her this slight deception, which did not do much harm to Maud, or to Mr. Sherlock, seeing neither was acquainted with it, but which did furnish forth a new dress or two for the next aspirant to matrimonial honours.

How Maud ever managed to pay for those dresses puzzles me to this hour. She did not come to me for a cheque, and further, she and my father and mother, and the younger fry, severally presented Miss Sherlock with appropriate if not expensive gifts, which were duly laid out, with other tokens of affection, on the drawingroom table, and elicited a considerable amount of admiration.

It was like a dream to me—more like a dream than any experience of my life, when I stood before the altar-rails vowing to take Catherine—to have and to hold her. People, I understand did not consider my self-possession perfect on the memorable occasion; but then, men are not usually so calm in the presence of danger as the softer sex, and whatever may have been my shortcomings in the matter of confidence they were amply redeemed by the admirable bearing of the bride. Then, as since, on the occasions of christenings, dinner-parties, death-beds, and so forth, Catherine behaved herself to perfection.

Her voice was neither too loud nor too low; and when, the ceremony over, we repaired to the vestry, the manner in which she kissed her mother and friends without disarranging the folds of her veil, or the lace on her dress, was worthy of all commendation.

For the last time she signed in a neat ladylike hand her name, Catherine Sherlock; and then, a little impatient perhaps of the kissing and congratulations, I asserted my newly-acquired rights, and drawing her hand within my arms, walked off with *my wife* to the carriage that awaited our appearance.

The other carriages rapidly followed, and after an interval employed by the ladies in admiring the presents, and by the men, as I have cause to believe, in "doing sherry and seltzer," we all went solemnly and slowly downstairs to breakfast.

I wish I had sufficient ability to reproduce before the reader's imagination that wedding-breakfast as it is photographed on my memory; for the absurdity of the whole affair impressed me vastly, though Heaven knows I never felt in a less laughing humour than when it became necessary for me to return thanks for the beautiful, graceful, and accomplished bride and myself.

True I went to the altar a willing sacrifice, but still it did not seem to me exactly a fitting occasion for merry-making. I might have felt differently had Rose been my bride, but then Rose was not my bride, which made all the difference. The match could not be regarded other than remarkably suitable in every respect save one, and I knew this. Nevertheless, though the grand mansion in Tyburnia, furnished throughout by the best London upholsterers, and decorated with that pure taste for which Englishmen are so remarkable, may be, in the world's opinion and your own, a most desirable residence, it cannot quite come up to the beauty of the air palace you built, lying under the beech trees that summer afternoon long ago.

And this was just my case. I felt Miss Sherlock was my reality, and Rose my illusion; but while acknowledging the great blessing Providence had given me, I did not feel inclined to sing a psalm of thanksgiving over the razing of my dream castle to the ground.

Nevertheless, as I have said, the absurdity of the whole affair struck me forcibly, as anything ridicu-

lous always does strike one most forcibly at the most solemn seasons. That so many people should have been invited to witness our launch filled my soul, when I beheld them seated round Mr. Sherlock's table, with surprise not unmingled with awe. I could not tell what the day seemed like. It was not like a Sunday, nor yet a week-day; it had not the ghastly cheerfulness of Christmas, nor the brightness of Easter. Rather, it appeared to me a cross between Good Friday and going to a morning performance at Drury Lane. I had a sense of being out for the occasion unlawfully, and I kept wondering what all those people would do after we left them; how they would occupy the time till they returned to the grand ball wherewith Mr. and Mrs. Sherlock meant to celebrate the event of a new member being added to the family circle.

There were men and women present who had long outlived the illusions of youth, if their youth ever held any; there were husbands who had made their wives' hearts ache, and wives who, after twenty years of matrimony, still lacked information on that useful branch of knowledge—how to make home happy; and yet these people, utterly ignorant as to whether our venture might not turn out as badly as their own, sat at that marriage feast, and smiled and ate, as though there were no such things as unhappiness and indigestion on earth.

They were "drest in all their best," in order to see me take my Sally abroad, and I should think much money must have changed hands in order to

effect such gorgeous results; so that in our small way we benefited trade, and I feel no doubt but the confectioner who provided the breakfast and the hired waiters, who ministered to the wants of exhausted humanity, rose up and called me blessed for having married Miss Sherlock.

Amongst the guests were two authors, one of whom, with that reverence for the sanctity of private life that distinguishes some votaries of literature, reproduced the scene in one of his clever novels, only changing our names, our rank, and the place of our abode. In his hand Mr. Sherlock became Sir Joseph Shylock, who, having made his money by discounting bills at two hundred per cent., stood for some borough far distant from the scene of his early struggles, was duly returned, made himself necessary to the then government, and earned for his reward the honours of knighthood.

Too great a man ostensibly to continue the bill-discounting business, he nevertheless, *sub rosa*, lent money to those younger and elder sons, who had either money in expectation, or friends in the background.

Sir Joseph never appeared in any of these transactions himself, but employed as jackal a man in his confidence, in comparison to whom the knight was honesty and simplicity itself.

This man, young in years but old in wickedness, named Cottrell, in consideration of the hold he possessed over Sir Joseph, was promised one of the daughters in marriage—a beautiful creature, secretly

enamoured of a marvellously clever poet. How the story proceeded space will not permit me to relate in detail, only the end of it all was, that Shylock and Cottrell came to grief owing to a little accident in connection with the signature of a noble Marquis, and that the clever poet who possessed a knowledge of business and law—vague possibly, but yet remarkable withal in one of so dreamy and romantic a nature—put such a pressure upon lover and father, that the hand of the beauteous Rachel was bestowed upon him, together with an infinite number of fat money-bags.

I have read that novel quite through, not without interest.

"Jenkins always draws his characters from the life," say the critics, "and therein lies the principal charm of his rare genius." Having sat unconsciously for one of his characters, I can only add I hope his people are not considered like life.

As for his rare genius—well, perhaps I had better pass that on without asking you, reader, to swallow as much of it as Mr. Sherlock's guests did of champagne.

For me I did not drink deep, and yet when I rose to return thanks for Catherine and myself, the room seemed to be spinning round and the people with it. Accustomed I was to public speaking, but this private speaking across the skeletons of fowls, and the *débris* of salad, over cut-glass and the best electro-plate, tried my equanimity.

How I got through that speech I do not know.

I held on to the table with both hands, so that if it went awry I might go also. I told a great many untruths. I uttered a vast number of truisms. There were cheers, there was laughter; people said, "Capital," and it may have been capital for aught I know; all I can now remember is that I wound up by declaring it was the happiest day of my life, at which statement Mrs. Sherlock looked at me with an expression of approbation, and wiped away a tear.

Then even more toasts and more champagne was drunk. After a time the table became quite steady, and I was able ultimately to face the fact that Catherine had slipped away to change her dress, and that the moment when we two were together to start in reality on our travels through the world, was at hand.

The trunks were already beside the coachman; the young ladies were already in the balcony armed with white slippers; already a crowd had formed itself on each side of the hall-door, to witness the bride's exit from her father's home; and I stood waiting for her appearance.

I could not tell you, reader, how my heart sank at the sound of the rustle of her dress. If I never knew it before, I knew then the whole affair was a mistake—a lamentable mistake for one of us, if not for both; and I screwed up my courage to go out with her for life, as many a man has done to go out in the chill winter's morning with Mr. Calcraft and the chaplain.

God forgive me, I felt at that moment like one who has committed some great and irretrievable sin.

I went forward to meet her. They thought I was eager, whereas I was only desperate. There was some kissing — much kissing indeed. Catherine wept on the ample maternal bosom, and took the starch out of her father's elaborate shirt frill.

I liked her better then than I had ever done. After all, it required some confidence for a girl to put her whole future in a man's hand, and I vowed to myself I would try and be good to her.

It was a break, and she felt it. She was leaving the old familiar life and the tried friends and the loving parents.

"Good-bye, Luttrell, and be sure to write." That was my father-in-law.

"Good-bye, Thomas. I am quite happy about my child." That was Mrs. Sherlock, with the tears trickling down her antiquated cheeks. And "good-bye, and good-bye, and good-bye," echoed round, whilst between a line composed of the very rank and file of London life, I led my weeping bride from the house where she had pursued her maiden meditations on the all-absorbing maiden theme—"How to get married, and to whom."

Swish came down a shower of white slippers, and a chorus of young voices called out, "Good-bye," and "God speed." The coachman touched his horses, and we were off on the journey of life together.

"Compartment?—Yes, sir,—quite right, sir,—lug-

gage, — I will see to that, sir." Thus spoke the guard, locking us up safely together in a carriage, from which there was no escape.

"How could he know?" I asked Catherine; "and what are the porters grinning at?"

"One of the slippers lodged on the top of my imperial. Did you not see it? I did." And Catherine proceeded, quite systematically, to see that her belongings were all safe, and that nothing had been left behind.

"My shepherd's-plaid shawl!" she exclaimed, "they have forgotten to put that up." And then, I confess, the whole affair began to assume a commonplace aspect.

We were off; and I sat thinking. Shall I make a full and free confession to this woman, whom I have sworn to love till the day of my death? Shall I establish a link between us—tell her, with God's help I mean to try and love her more than I ever love that other? Shall I venture on the dangerous ground of being frank with a wife and that on our wedding-day?

"I do hope," Catherine broke in at this juncture, while the express tore along, "I do hope they have not forgotten anything else. It will be so inconvenient not having that shawl."

"We can buy another one," I answered, taking her hand; but she had dispelled all thought of a confession, which has never since been made till now.

And it was quite as well. I understand perfectly

my Catherine could neither have comprehended its import, nor borne its repetition.

We learn many things as we grow old, and amongst them the value and virtue of reticence even towards the wife of our bosom concerning the things which lie next our heart.

CHAPTER IV.

MARRIAGE.

SOME people say that those blissful days which it is usual to spend as far from home and a man's ordinary occupation as possible, are the most trying of married life, and this may well be so, seeing that it is a serious experiment to make, that of passing an entire month alone with anybody—more especially the new wife of one's bosom—but I did not find my honeymoon wearisome; on the contrary, I think it enabled me to get more gradually accustomed to the singular fact of being married and independent no longer, than would have been possible had I stepped with Mrs. Luttrell at once into the house already referred to, whereof my Catherine had selected the furniture.

It is a great change to any man to get married, and one requires some little time to become quite reconciled to great changes, whether they be desirable or the reverse. Therefore, as the thirty days we spent on the continent were a sort of ante-room

where I was permitted to loiter before entering into the full state of domestic felicity which awaited me in England, I shall ever retain a grateful recollection of the opportunity thus afforded of coming gradually to a knowledge of the happiness I might reckon upon in the life I had—voluntarily, shall I say ?—chosen.

During the honeymoon Catherine proved herself to be just what she has continued ever since—a woman admirably adapted to sustain and even advance her husband's social position—a woman who liked to go and see places, to the end that she might talk about them afterwards, but who took no interest in anything, whether in art or nature, for pure love of art or love of nature. In itself I am quite confident she considered moonlight then what she considers moonlight now—an infinitely poorer invention than gas-light; that in her heart she greatly preferred the Parisian shops to any cathedral or picture-gallery we visited; that she liked much better going to the theatre than contemplating the beauties of the Rhine; and that the new bonnet she took back with her to England, afforded her much more unqualified pleasure than the memory of any landscape on which her eyes had rested.

And was I disappointed ? On the contrary. Here was a wife just fitted for me; one whose sensibilities required no delicate handling, no anxious consideration, who although she loved me as much as she knew how, was not likely to prove exacting and ask for or even to understand that passionate, all-absorb-

ing love which having poured out upon one woman I believed I could never give to another.

The love Rose awoke would only have amazed and wearied Catherine. Whilst a man was being brought skilfully on to proposing point, and from that point up to the culminating point of matrimony, it might be well enough to humour his sentimental fancy for quiet walks and talks; but that a man and wife should care to be alone, that they should live out of society, and affect the company of one another to the exclusion of desirable acquaintances, were ideas utterly foreign to the admirably regulated mind of Catherine Luttrell, *née* Sherlock, and as sooth to say I was not now particularly desirous of spending a *tête-à-tête* existence, we suited each other capitally. She wrote home that Thomas was the best and most generous husband in the world; to which Mrs. Sherlock replied, that she had always felt I would make her treasure happy. Have I done so?

There is one black memory that I recall while tracing these lines, one act of my life I would give everything I ever possessed or am ever likely to possess to be able to undo. We never talk about it, not even Joan and I, but it has left a dark track across my heart, and whatever it might have proved to Catherine, it has been to me the bitterest and most unsoothed trouble of a not particularly untroubled existence.

Had I spoken to her out of the fulness of my heart on our wedding-day, as I once purposed, would

that sorrow lie heavy on my conscience now? Perhaps not, but the forgotten shawl stopped my intended confession, and thinking of that shawl I sometimes imagine that not merely the penitence but also the grief is mine alone; that I did not wound her so vitally as I feared, and that I have fretted myself needlessly over a matter which possibly never first nor last cost her a night's sleep.

But this comes later in my story. We could foresee no storm or sign of a storm at the point I have now reached—our return to England. Rather everything there betokened and rightly a long continuance of fair weather. Catherine liked her house, and, being the mistress of it, she liked welcoming her mother and sisters in her drawing-room, and she welcomed them frequently without remonstrance or hindrance from me; she liked having plenty of money, and I gave her all I could spare and worked hard to get more for her; she liked being married to a man whose relations did not trouble her much and yet remained on perfectly friendly terms. If bitterness mingled with her cup it was because a portion of my income went to maintain the modest establishment at Southgate. It was folly for me ever to have told her anything concerning that, but people entertain some ridiculous ideas about our being quite frank before marriage, which is the more extraordinary since nobody is frank after, and not having had the benefit of any previous connubial experience I made the usual mistake and consequently have since, on various occasions, repented my communications.

That is, I used to repent, for there is no one for me to support or for her to grumble about now. They are dead, or pushing their own ways in the world, or far beyond any help of mine; but even if this were not the case Catherine would not complain.

A passage of arms occurred between us once, when, though I was severely wounded, she got the worst shock of the encounter. Since then Catherine has been more submissive, and I—more considerate.

I wonder if she be really happy now? I wonder if she ever think ours might have been a better life—made a better thing out of, somehow?

If I could even form an idea of what she might answer, I would ask her one evening in the twilight, or when the fire is burning low, to tell me all she thinks about it, but I dread being asked at the supreme moment to light the gas, or to give her that work-basket containing those slippers, still unfinished, of which mention was honourably made in the first page of "My First Love."

We have never been accustomed to talk. Somebody says, or rather, indeed, a great many persons say, talking is not conversing as eating is not dining, which is just one of those one-sided statements that makes a man who is not likely to be misled by a neatly turned sentence angry, more especially when he knows by bitter experience that conversing may be as far removed from talking as dining from eating.

We never talked at any rate. We always con-

versed. This habit commenced in our honeymoon, and it grew stronger with age. If I were in the most terrible trouble I could only give my wife the barest outline of facts. To fill in the details would be a simple impossibility—to expatiate on how it affected me a feat beyond my power. Joan says I do not even talk to my children, but then she does not quite understand that if I did talk to them they would not appreciate the attention.

Yes, taking it altogether mine has been a lonely life, though I have lived always amongst people—and a spoiled one, though I have made money as well as a fair reputation. It is a strange thing to consider how desolate one mischance may in reality leave a man, though apparently he have made a very good thing for himself of existence. If the fates decree that one is to be for fifty years out of the three score and ten wholly and solely a denizen of the world as the world obtains here in London, it might be as well to have no memories of murmuring rivulets and quiet woods associated with the first twenty.

Sentiment, for example, will never embitter the future happiness of my young people, who I earnestly hope will marry other young people as purely worldly and superficial as themselves. One of my sons has developed a certain talent for literature, and will, I doubt not, in time favour the world with various three-volume novels (if three volumes obtain so long), treating of that semi-fashionable society which he knows, and that entirely fashion-

able society which he is never likely to know, and in due time probably I shall appear in print as a respectable but unapproachable father.

Well, so be it. Children it is said take after their mother. It is eminently flattering to my vanity to be quite satisfied none of mine take after me.

To return, however, to the days when children were not in my home—neither the puling infant nor the young gentleman in knickerbockers—a style of costume that, despite Mr. Thackeray's dictum and Messrs. Nicoll's advertisement, I detest with a detestation worthy of a better cause—what can I recollect of those days? All through my rambling talk I have been trying to remember.

Any memory of home comfort? Perhaps so: if home comfort mean simply hot and cold water in one's dressing-room, linen left out by my wife's maid, for I kept no valet, dinner fairly cooked and reasonably hot, a fairly good glass of wine with and after it, breakfast to a moment in the morning, I had home comforts. And the days were gone when a vision of a sweet face uplifted to mine, of the loving clasp of a soft hand, of a dear voice welcoming me after my labour, was the sum and total of the only home comfort I ever wished or hoped to realize. People take to luxury and physical ease when they find the "better part" of existence cannot be possessed by them; so, failing my dream habitation, which might have been up three pair of stairs or in Buckingham Palace for any local habitation I cared to give it, I was well enough

content to go back evening after evening to a house where the stairs were covered with the best and newest Brussels carpeting; where I hung up my hat on a highly veneered stand, resplendent with a most unnecessary looking-glass; where passing the dining-room door I could see the table set out in the best style by our youthful buttons; where I could generally hear the tones of Catherine's grand piano, and where as I entered the drawing-room, I was usually greeted not only by my wife, but also by a couple of her sisters, and sometimes by Mrs. Sherlock herself.

And it did not then strike me as anything very dreadful that this was all the sort of home I was ever likely to know. When a man first takes possession of Mrs. Parkins' first floor, (sitting-room with bed-room at the back and attendance), he does not fully realize what life in that lady's desirable lodgings is certain to prove when weeks have passed into months and months into years; and in like manner when people first marry they scarcely grasp the fact that it is for the whole of existence—that they have made a choice which can never be rescinded till they stand remorseful beside the death-bed of that him or her who chances to be husband or wife, and by the time they have made this discovery they have "got used to it," for great is the force of habit and the lulling effect of time.

I got used to it. I am used to it. Were Catherine to die, she would not have a sincerer mourner than myself; but there is not, I am happy to say,

the slightest chance, speaking humanly, of my survivorship. My wife has a capital constitution, and takes good care of it. She eats well, drinks well, sleeps well, and refrains from all undue mental excitement. In the future I mentally behold her a large, handsome, well preserved widow, taking an interest in all the affairs of this world, and keeping up a sort of visiting acquaintance with those of the next; ruling her household to the last judiciously and severely; regretting the late Mr. L.—she speaks of me as Mr. L. now, and though privately objecting strongly to the title, I am morally too great a coward to object publicly to any form of address she may be pleased to select.

Time went by, and truly and duly I was a father and Mrs. Sherlock a grandmother. Great ceremonies attended the arrival and christening of that first-born. We were all perhaps a little unduly excited over the event, and considered it a stranger incident than might from the Registrar-General's returns have been supposed. Catherine was one of those women who think it the correct thing to have a certain number of children (the more the better), just as they think it proper to have a large number of desirable acquaintances on their visiting list. I do not believe she was particularly fond of children, but she liked to be a mother. She liked the fuss which is always made on these occasions when women are well off and have plenty of female relations,—the bustle of preparation, and the excuse it gave for shopping and spending money, pleased

her inexpressibly; and when at length the little one came—a boy—well, well, it is not for me to throw stones, or to attempt too keenly to analyze what her feelings may have been, for I know when I went to my chambers that day, I dreamed another dream even more illusory than my last, about a son who should be to me what I had striven to be to my father; to whom I could in the after-time talk, as the old man talked, thank God, to me; who should be, if "odd," faithful,—if "peculiar," intelligible, to my understanding: who should lack nothing my labour and my love might give him: who should resemble in his strength and his devotion and his tenderness Joan who had sat with me and Rose on the grass by the river-side, and pelted the birds with cherry-stones, and wandered wild through the woods and fields, and grown up finally into the noblest woman I ever knew.

Dreams, friends,—air castles; dreams from which I have since awakened,—air castles I have beheld melt gradually away. I love my children, I hope, but I cannot help seeing what they are. Never an one of them has "strained back" to unselfishness and a high ideal of the duties which the very fact of being placed in this world devolves upon all men and all women.

They are amiable enough as times go, and to a certain extent companionable also; but they have had everything they wanted, from their youth up, and I am not sure that it is a good thing for youth to have everything it wants, and to regard middle

and old age as an anomaly, which is permitted to exist merely because it has a certain power of work in it, and can provide the wherewithal for girls to go to balls, and boys to spend money recklessly at college.

In the next generation it may be, there will be born to one of my children—for these things are inscrutable—a gipsy-faced little maiden who shall comfort the weary heart of some world-tired father, whom the heat and burden of his day has almost overpowered, and be as strong to help as she is powerful to console.

Shall I live to see this dream-baby? Shall I, when feeble and whitehaired, look with dimmed vision into eyes that may remind me of that dream-sister now almost as far removed from me as though the valley of the shadow lay between? Shall saucy tongue prattle to me with the daring *abandon* of the reckless Joan of old? Shall a brown-skinned romp ever fling her arms about me, and kiss my furrowed face, as I have seen Joan kiss Rose? Forgive me, friends, for I seem to be growing childish already, and it needs one fierce, wicked memory to convince me that I am not yet in my dotage.

But a twelvemonth since Joan said to me,—

'My second boy is so like you, Tom, that I wish you would let me bring him to see you."

And then I blazed out,—

"At your peril, Joan. I want to see no child of yours for ever." In answer to which came no harsh

words, though mothers are usually vicious towards those who turn aside from their offspring.

She only said, "My poor Tom;" and I could gather from her tone, though my glance was averted, that there were tears in those dark eyes (still beautiful), drawn from their fountain by pity for me.

After all, why should I receive such pity? Rose was only a weak woman, and she married another, leaving me lonely—as better and holier and truer men have been left lonely by woman since the beginning of time, and will be left till eternity.

It is a misfortune to have a heart. Happily my children—over whom I lament to have sung so grievous a Jeremiad—are not much troubled with so delicate an organ.

I mean mentally, of course. Physically I believe they are quite sound, tried by the best stethoscope.

CHAPTER V.

MY VISITOR.

TIME meanwhile went by in a quiet, orderly sort of way: he did not linger, he did not travel by express. There cannot be either much lingering or much express work in the life of a plodder, and that I soon became.

It was needful to provide so many guineas a week for the household expenses deemed by my beloved necessaries; it was essential for me also to consider rent and taxes, insurance—fire and life—the demands of tailor, milliner, and draper, and last and least (in point of expense) the modest sum required to keep poverty from the little farm at Southgate.

Taken in detail, the items might not be great, but taken in the aggregate and looking back dispassionately on the events of my life as though they had happened to another man, I think it was more than any one person ought to have been called upon to furnish out of his own brains.

Ladies, of course, will call me a "brute" for such a remark, but that is merely because as yet ladies are not men. When Messrs. Mill and Bright transform them into the baser sex—and with masculine privileges force masculine responsibilities upon them, as I hope the champions of women's rights may—the dear creatures will better understand what I mean, and wonder, perchance, "How men endured it so long." Endured,—that is, the social humbug which makes it necessary for a man, no matter what his ways and means may be, to live in a given style: to allow his wife so much a week: to take a house at so much a year, and as a rule choose the alternative of bankruptcy or softening of the brain.

The present writer has experienced neither disease, and yet he dare affirm more husbands by ten thousand die of the causes which produce both results, than any registrar-general is ever likely to guess.

Men's lives are, as a rule, spent in keeping roofs over other people's heads,—in maintaining a household from which they derive no benefit,—in paying tradesmen's bills for food they never eat,—in seeing that rent for places they never see save late at night and early in the morning, falls into no arrear.

Most wonderful is this London existence. Marvellous even to those who are pilgrims through it, as well as to the mere lookers-on.

But I digress; and yet, no—for this everlasting wear and tear, this mental and physical strain which tried my strength and taxed my energies to their

utmost in the days when I was but a struggling barrister, and an author little known, have made me, I think, as much as Rose's desertion, the man people say I am.

At the recollection of the earlier years of my married life, I shudder. Ease of mind I never knew, rest of body I never had. It was all very well for Catherine—a woman possessed of a power of enjoying unbroken slumbers, I believe to be unequalled—to talk of my morning's sleep, and my Sunday afternoon nap; she did not know the former was earned by a night devoted to the next chapter in my novel, or the consideration of ways and means; and that the latter was a mere excuse for getting rid of the chit-chatter of her visitors.

First or last I never told my wife our commencement was a mistake,—that we began just about where we should have left off; and that so far as I am personally concerned, until within the last few years, life has been a mere fight—to keep the wolf from this door and from that.

Before my books were hatched in my brain, the poor chickens—lean and meagre enough—were sold. and the proceeds paid away; before I held my briefs, the guineas they brought in were condemned. I have been what the world calls a prosperous man, and yet I can honestly declare I have envied my clerk and my errand boy; and believing Catherine's "Buttons" to be pecuniarily solvent, I have often envied him too.

For it is true, Mesdames and Demoiselles though

you may not believe me, that life in the nineteenth century is not all play, and that the man who sets out determined to maintain a certain position, has rather more work before him than he might exactly relish, could he, looking forward, foresee all his head and his hands must find to do.

I found it to do, and did it—and for so much am thankful—but had I to begin the battle over again, not all the mothers-in-law in England would persuade me to commence life in that unexceptionable home, provided with good (and expensive) servants, furnished with the best furniture from garret to kitchen, and stamping us as "persons bound to keep up a certain appearance."

We have kept that appearance up, and society and my wife are satisfied. Why then should I be dissatisfied?—I, who have been the humble means of pleasing the ruling powers? When the good time comes—and the clergyman treads swift on the heels of the doctor, and the undertaker walks lightly and rapidly after both, to take the last measurement my body will ever require—no one can say I have not, as a Briton, done my duty.

I have married, and children have been born to me. I have paid rent and taxes for a period which seems illimitable and with a resignation that might touch the heart of Mr. Lowe himself. I have fed servants whom I never wanted; entertained visitors I never desired to see; made money for the benefit of West End tradespeople, and being in Rome, failed in no respect, according to my light, to do as Rome desired.

And yet I think I was a fool for my pains. Better a "genteel six-roomed residence," than this ceaseless money-getting and money-paying. Better, ah! heaven, a hundred times the dinner of herbs procured for cash than the stalled ox purchased on credit, or purchased at least thus far on credit, that the money for our Sunday's joint and trimmings was never in my pocket on the Saturday night preceding.

Well, it was to be, I suppose,—at all events it was,—and time and I and work went on together, and the pecuniary tread-mill became a familiar flight of steps.

Supposing a man to be successful in business, he can employ clerks, and so superintend their doings; he can turn his thousands by paying thousands. But suppose a barrister, or an author, salary his ten heads or twenty pair of hands, can he indite the life history of Smith by instructing Jones to bring him in so many folios closely written, or can he defend the cause of Brown by telling Robinson to notice all the nicest points in the case?

Decidedly not; and therefore, oh! millionaire, when you hold up your hands for the future at the price paid for his work to some poor devil whom you honour by occasionally asking to dinner, or grudge Mr. Sarjeant the hundred-guinea fee that is his due,—just please to take these small matters into consideration. The capital of each is in his head, and if you could only imagine how often authors and barristers have a quarrel with that banker in

order to get him to honour their drafts, you would think law and literature none such pleasant professions after all.

But, pshaw!—why should I preach? my day has been profitable, and if I have worked what then? It is the lot of man, and work has been more blessed to me than any leisure I can imagine. Yea, truly.

Nevertheless, I worked, and hard, for which reason I often remained late at my chambers, instead of seeking that relaxation in the bosom of a steadily increasing family, which I am given to understand is good alike for the soul and body of man.

Catherine, fortunately, was not of a suspicious disposition, or what she might have thought of my constant professional absorption, who can say?

Many wives do not credit the narratives men tell concerning important business engagements, and work pursued far into the night, away from home, and in many cases there is reason for this unbelief but so far as I am concerned, had the partner of my joys, and the liberal disburser of my earnings, done me the honour of making a friendly call in Pump Court at almost any hour in the evening, she would have found me busy with brief or manuscript, guiltless of any act or thought or project disloyal to her.

But Catherine never did me the honour of calling, and in all candour I may say I did not want her to do so. Having to work, it was best for me to labour on without even the pleasing distraction of a visit

from my wife. Very few people came "in a friendly way" to my chambers, where briefs now arrived rapidly as could be desired. I had not many male acquaintances, and as for women I was scarcely on more than speaking terms with any save those of my own household.

Day after day I wended my way through the Temple—(before my marriage I had left Staples Inn, for more legally aristocratic quarters),—until every stone in the place grew familiar as the fields and woods of my boyhood had been. Day after day I repaired to court, and sometimes won the suit and sometimes lost it. Most frequently, however, fortune was with me. Night after night I worked late and hard, allowing myself little relaxation, except an occasional half-hour's walk under the winter stars, or in the summer evening's twilight through the deserted nooks and corners of the Temple.

How many dinners I ate in those years at the "George," I should be afraid to reckon. How many cigars I smoked pacing slowly round the church of the old Knights Templar, or walking by Goldsmith's grave, or (more rarely) sauntering through the gardens, it would be impossible to count. Essentially I had become a lonely man, caring but little for anything save my profession and the money it brought me, valuing literary success merely just so far as it contributed towards the support of a rising family, and attaching importance to adverse criticism only to the extent it reduced the amount of the next cheque sent by my publishers.

Occasionally Catherine and I went to parties together; sometimes even we repaired in each other's company to the theatre and the opera, but as a rule she accompanied her father and mother, or matronized her sisters to those festive gatherings which were in our sphere considered amusing and proper.

I had not, in a general way, time to spend on what my wife called "keeping up our connection," so she sedulously devoted herself to that pleasing duty, and at this moment were anyone to enquire of Mrs. Luttrell as to the special causes which have contributed to such worldly success as we can boast, she would, I doubt not, answer, "Well, you know, I did not, like many women, relinquish society when I married; I was always careful to make and retain desirable acquaintances."

And to do her justice she was; but were the debit and credit column added up, and a strict account made out of profit and loss, the result of Catherine's tactics would not, I think, prove to have been gain. However, she believes she has fulfilled the duty of existence, and no doubt she is right since every one says how desirable a thing it is for a professional man to possess so admirable a wife.

I wish some one would tell me why—and inform me at the same time what possible advantage it can be to a man for a woman to dress herself out, evening after evening, like Solomon in all his glory, for the mere sake of making the eighteenth at a dinner-party, or the two hundred and first at one of

those popular entertainments ironically called an "At Home."

From all of which the attentive reader will readily understand that we soon became a very fashionable couple, interfering little one with the other, meeting only at breakfast on week-days, and having but little in common to talk over when Sunday came, and with the day of rest orthodox church-going, early dinner, and an afternoon devoted to the claims of society and the pleasure of seeing many callers.

Occasionally, indeed, we had dinner parties, and then I reached our house in time to see to the wines and receive my wife's instructions as to whom I was to take down; while once at least in every season my wife issued cards for an "At Home," more crowded, more uncomfortable, and more hot than any she herself had attended, on which occasion it was *de rigueur* that I should be in attendance though I am sure nobody wanted me, and I did not want myself.

My real "At Home," however, was in Pump Court, when with closely drawn curtains and blazing fire, I settled myself down for an evening's thorough work. Even now I can recall the peace of those quiet hours; I can look back with satisfaction on the amount of willing labour I got through in the days, and months, and years between the first romance of my life and my last—between the first sorrow of my existence, which I got over, and that last which is present with me even now.

Anxieties I had, it is true, and the eternal pressure

of providing for a style of living far beyond my actual position in life. As my brothers grew older also my responsibilities seemed to increase. They were always getting into scrapes; one, indeed, got into something worse than a scrape, and it needed much money and, what was even more important, much time to extricate him, and of course the whole burden of trouble and expense and anxiety fell on me.

But my shoulders were broad, and the burden was not more than I could carry, and I did, or thought I did, my duty, and the old love lay buried under the apple-blossoms, and the soft green turf, and the dead autumnal leaves of the long ago time.

For years I had never beheld Rose Surry—never heard tidings of her.

Sometimes, indeed, I saw the names of Sir Walter and Lady Surry mentioned amongst those of other fashionable persons who had "graced with their presence," or "been honoured with invitations," but this was all.

I had learnt only through the columns of the *Times* that Sir Humphrey Surry was dead and that Sir Walter the new king reigned in his stead, but my way lay so far apart from theirs, it was hard to understand how the threads of our lives could ever have crossed even for a moment, and sometimes I looked back upon the whole love story but as an unsubstantial dream.

The present baronet was a different individual, indeed, from the late Sir Humphrey, and at his

grand town house there were assemblies, and balls, and dinner parties innumerable, whilst when the season was over I read about the great people who were "partaking of the hospitalities of Grayborough." That was the way I think the gentleman who wrote the passage worded it.

Once, indeed, meeting Dick Tullett in the street (hearing I was slightly Bohemian he had eschewed all intimate acquaintance with me, and I had not cared to renew it even when the "elegancies and refinements of life" were, thanks to Mrs. Luttrell's good management, inmates of my home, though my wife and family now visit his), he told me he was going down to Grayborough, where I found subsequently he had formed one of a distinguished circle invited thither as guests of Sir Walter and Lady Surry.

He did not add he was going in order to paint her portrait. The man was ashamed of his trade and did not care to mention it, but I found out his errand to Grayborough, when next year I saw in the newspapers a criticism on Lady Surry's portrait in the Academy, painted by Richard Tullett, Esq., R.A.

I did not go to the Academy that season. She was too greatly removed, we were too far separated by rank and circumstances for even a pulse to beat the quicker at sight of her name, nevertheless, being married myself and she married, I thought it best to stay away. The disillusion also might have been too bitter. It was the child Rose—the darling I

met by the river now flowing on solitary—the sweet child-girl of a later growth whom I could remember so distinctly without bitterness, and I had no wish to see the woman, even on canvas, who was now far from me as the heaven from the earth.

So I did not go, and Lady Surry hung in a good light on the Academy walls, and Mr. Tullett's fortune was made. Had Rose been my wife, her portrait should not have been stared at by thousands in a public building, but then she was Lady Surry, a celebrated beauty, and I only a commoner with strong ideas concerning the sacredness of a woman's loveliness.

Had she been my wife I should have kept that portrait within my holy of holies, but then she was not my wife, and of course no one came to consult me on the subject. At a later period Mrs. Luttrell's portrait, to which allusion has already been made, also graced the Academy walls, but this publicity was entirely of her own choosing, and as I never could have forced a full comprehension on her of my intense dislike to such exhibitions the subject was not mooted between us.

She got the portrait painted at a very reasonable rate on the stipulation that it was to be exhibited, and when she told me a Mr. Snooks, who dined frequently at our house, and was a very good judge of the quality of our wines, had offered to perpetuate her charms on canvas, and purposed giving that portion of the British public who delight in effect and delight in art an opportunity of beholding them, I

said never a word in deprecation of her design. I did not even ask how much it was to cost, for fortune had smiled on me, and a few pounds more or less was not of such paramount importance as had once been the case.

So Mrs. Luttrell was duly done in oils, and Snooks got several good orders in consequence.

But as I was saying, had Rose been my wife that portrait should not have appeared in the catalogue.

I have had a copy of it made since, or rather a copy of it was made for me, but it gives me very little idea of Rose.

Of course after a thing of this sort has been copied, that copy photographed, the photograph re-drawn, and that re-production printed off, the likeness to the original sitter cannot be considered admirable, and yet I think the face which a judicious publisher has considered it prudent to include amongst the attractions of this story is not wholly unlike that which Tullett, R.A., painted, though it does not in the slightest degree resemble Rose—at least not to my mind—other people thought the original painting admirable, but in this as in many things more or less important, other people and I joined issue.

I never believed Dick Tullett, whether boy or man, could paint a woman, and I see no reason to alter my opinion—he has been dexterous, as you will observe, in the treatment of her necklace and drapery, but he was no more fortunate in his por-

trait of Lady Surry than of the child Rose, which he sketched in chalk one summer evening long ago—oh ! so long.

It was many a day after that portrait was painted ere I saw Rose again, and I am told there was a period in her life when the sweetness vanished out of her face, and there lay a sorrowful, almost sullen look in those eyes that had been so pure and innocent.

Fashionable hours, a perpetual round of visiting, whirling here and whirling there, being admired, flattered, yielded to, did not, I am told, improve her temper or her nature, and this may be so ; but all I know is that when we met again she was gentle and tender as of old, and that to whomsoever else she may have seemed arrogant and perverse, the only memory of her my heart holds is the recollection of a woman sweet and clinging, meek and loveable and loving ; the Rose of the murmuring rivulet ; the Rose who stood out with me under the moonlight when the apple-blossoms carpeted the ground, grown to womanhood unchanged in heart, unspoiled in nature.

But you want to know, at least I hope you do, when and how we met again after a lapse of time which had aged me considerably and made me a very different looking fellow to the Tom Luttrell who picked my first love's reticule out of the stream and sat on the brink with Joan and Rose, eating cherries and watching the trout gleaming in and out amongst the alders.

Marriage ages a working man everywhere, when once the first illusion is over, and he comes practically to understand the meaning of "little bills," and to know that a house, and wife, and a family cannot be maintained on air; that baker, butcher, tailor, shoemaker and milliner are tangible beings, oftentimes terrible realities; but in London the pace being faster and the expenses greater, and the time for mental and physical repose more limited, husbands age more rapidly than elsewhere.

I did at all events. While Lady Surry was still beautiful and still young, I had settled down into a grave, thoughtful man. Lines were traced across my forehead; grey hairs had cropped up from time to time; when I looked in the glass it was a face changed and worn that gazed back at me steadily and steadfastly, with grave thoughtful eyes. My youth was gone, and my elasticity with it. Already the life insurance seemed a good and desirable property, for I had left all dreams behind me, and understood thoroughly that the end of all our dreams is the last sound sleep, which none of the voices, whether sweet or harsh, that have disturbed and distracted us here shall be able to break.

I was sitting alone in my chambers one winter's night, just as I am doing now, only at this moment I chance to be writing a story, and then I was reading one, the plot whereof turned on a will over which two brothers were disputing, and the denoûement of which was still uncertain—my man, I ought to say, lost, though I believe he lost righteously—

when there came a ring at the hall door, closed long previously, and a moment afterwards the small boy who stole my stamps, smoked my cigars, read my letters, forgot to deliver messages, and who, in addition to his other sins, chanced to be a son of the elderly female who professed to keep my chambers clean and failed to do so, came head-first into the room, full of the astounding intelligence—

"Please, sir, a lady wants to see you, sir."

"What lady?" I asked, for the cave of St. Kevin or the isle of St. Senanus was not more innocent of female presence than those chambers in Pump Court. "What lady?" and then, looking up, I sat like one bewildered because of the apparition I beheld.

"Lady Surry!" I gasped.

She came across to the table against which I now stood unable to move, unable almost to believe the evidence of my senses. She laid her hand on my arm, and said just one word, "Tom."

That was all, and yet in a moment the mist of the years, with their misery and trouble, their labour and their anguish, seemed lifted like a veil, and I was young again, and life was still before me, and I was wandering, happy and unheeding, through the Elysian fields of yore.

CHAPTER VI.

LADY SURRY.

THERE are stories told of persons who, sleeping for only two minutes, have yet managed to dream dreams the actions and events of which were carried on through years—and I believe those stories, for although I was then wide awake, I dreamed a dream, in the span of about a single second of time, which extended over the happiest part of my life.

True my vision ended, before she took her hand away—it was over, and we both stood—parted—she a wife, I a husband, and yet not husband and wife; she a mother, I a father, and yet neither a drop's blood to the children of each other—parted as utterly as man and woman could be parted—we who had once been so much, she to me and I to her. So much! had we not been all in all?

"I am afraid I surprised—startled you," she began, "but I had not another friend in the world to whom I could come but yourself."

I pulled my own especial chair round to the fire for her, and seated myself at a little distance before I could quite steady my voice to answer. Then I said—

"What is the matter—what is wrong?"

"Everything," she answered, "and I want you to put it right." And then she looked at the fire for a second or so, and I could see that her face was worn and pale, and that her eyes—those dear, sweet, honest, childish eyes I remembered so well—were full of tears. "You are not angry with me for coming here, Tom, are you?" she asked at length.

"Angry, Lady Surry!" I repeated.

"Call me Rose," she said. "It will sound like the old times, and we have never been other than friends, have we?"

"No, indeed!" I answered.

Yet for the life of me I could not help remembering how much more than friends we had once been, and I wondered how she could forget or ignore it; but then women are mysteries (woman is the real enigma of existence), and the extent to which they can forget and ignore, even while recalling, is marvellous to the present writer.

"All these years I have watched your success, I have read your books, I have been proud of and jealous for you as Joan might be. I heard of you—of you all. Though I never wrote, I never forgot Joan nor any of you."

Not knowing what reply to make to this, I held my peace.

"I thought of writing to you often," she went on, "to say how glad I was to hear of your success, and to ask after Joan, and the rest; but then I decided I would not. You did not think me unkind, did you?"

I should have thought it a most marvellous thing had she written, though such letters are sent daily, I believe, in London; and yet I was pleased to know the tender little heart had felt impelled to send some token of remembrance, though it fluttered back again without fulfilling its purpose.

"No," I said, "I could never think you unkind."

"Thank you," she said. "And I knew that although you had become a great author" (Heaven help her innocence!) "and been so successful in every way" (I felt as if my soul must have uttered a cry at hearing this, as if I must tell her what a wretched unsatisfactory life it had all been), "you would not quite forget old times, but help me if you could."

I got up from my chair and paced the room once, twice, thrice. I verily believed if she went on much longer she would drive me mad.

I thought of the Egyptian bondage into which I had sold myself—and there sat she, the only thing I had ever desired or hoped to possess, congratulating me on having partaken of the leeks and cucumbers of that accursed land.

Why could she not have left me alone? Why had she ever come there?

"Rose"—I spoke her name quite distinctly, and

without a tremour in my voice; it was the first time since her marriage it had ever to my knowledge passed my lips; when delirious, no doubt I spoke it often enough. "Rose, if you want my help, I am ready to give it, if I can serve you—with all the veins of my heart I will do so—but for God's sake let the dead past lie buried—do not talk of old times to me."

Then she turned away, and I knew it was to hide her tears.

These women, oh, these women! they turn down a page in a man's life's book, and go away and attend to a thousand things; they marry, they bear children, they make a hundred fresh friends, they have a score of admirers, and then, after years, they return and open the old book, and expect that the tale can be proceeded with, or the former story recalled innocently or half indifferently as once they read it: whilst the man——

Well, I had set Rose crying—not a difficult operation to perform—poor Rose.

"I did not mean to wound you," I began, when I could endure the sight of her grief no longer.

"I know you did not," she answered, "but I am so miserable and so stupid."

"What is the matter?" I asked.

"Walter will not let me live with him any longer, and he has taken my children away."

"And you——"

"I have done nothing wrong—oh! Tom," she cried passionately, "if nobody else believes in me,

won't you? He has been so cruel and so hard; and then to take away my children." She never said "our children." She never, first or last, through that interview wept or made lamentation for him.

"Have you left Grayborough, then," I inquired.

"No, but he has, and taken my children too, and I could not stay there alone. He calculated on that—and I have come up here to ask you to help me. I do not want money—or anything—if he will only give me my children."

That was the refrain. Poor little desolate heart, she could not remain alone—she could not live separated from those she loved. Through a mist I saw the child I had first beheld sobbing by the stream, little caring in her babyish grief what the future might have to hold for her beside her mother's anger at the drenched reticule. And the years had come, and the years had gone, and behold this was what they had brought—a loveless marriage—a distrustful husband—a desolate home, and a frantic flight to the only being who could, she said, help her.

I had thought much and often about Lady Surry during the course of my married life, but I had never dreamed of anything like this—never seen her, even in the wildest of fancy's night-mares, sitting thus in my chambers—a despised wife—a childless mother—a lonely, broken-hearted woman.

"It can soon be set right though," I said at length, speaking rather as the sequence of a long

train of thought than in answer to her last remark; but Rose shook her head—

"Walter was always jealous," she explained, "he never quite trusted me. He knew—" at this point she stopped and hesitated, and I did not encourage her to proceed—we both understood the finish of the unspoken sentence too well.

"If I am to be of any service to you," I began after a short pause, "you must be frank with me; tell me the whole story from beginning to end, so far as it concerns this matter."

"I will try," she said, bearing and leaning back in the chair, she began at the commencement of her trouble, and told me all about it right through without a break.

There was not much in it, nothing but the usual tale of a man's jealousy and a woman's folly. Rose had always been a little simpleton, and furthermore a naughty, perverse child, going where she was told not to go, and doing the things she had been bidden to leave alone.

Sitting there listening to her confession, I remembered how having been ordered not to go to the river she went—alas! for me.

Well, the whole of her married life had been on a piece with that. If Walter Surry desired her not to waltz, the first thing he beheld was Rose whirling round to the music of the then most fashionable *trois temps*. If he told her he wished such and such persons treated with only distant courtesy, he was certain to find the obnoxious indi-

viduals in her box at the opera, beside her carriage in the Row, close at hand in the ball-rooms.

I could have led her with a silken thread, or I fancy I could, which comes to much about the same thing; but knowing the persistent obstinacy with which she disregarded her mother's commands, I arrived at the conclusion, that on the whole, Walter Surry's life with his wife had not been one of unmixed happiness, that, with his temperament, the blessing of such a wife as Rose could not have proved entirely unmixed, and at first, I confess my sympathies were with him, but when she went on to tell me how he intercepted her letters, and held her answerable for the impertinent folly of a man who thought she meant to give him encouragement, when she was only in her folly trying to pass the hours pleasantly with a pleasant companion, whom she had once assured me she "hated" —when she recited her tears and prayers—her frantic assurance of innocence, her entreaties that he would not part her from her children—the pity of old stirred within my heart, and for one moment—one wild, mad, passionate moment—I reflected had I been but free, and that this chance had offered, I would, in spite of fifty husbands, have taken her to myself, and kept her—so far as it lay in the power of man to do it—free from harm and sorrow for ever.

And then, thank God, that feeling passed away, for I remembered what she was, and what I, and

that there lay between us that which no honest man, no virtuous woman, may ever cross.

To me she might be Rose—but she was also Lady Surry; to her I might be Tom, the lover of her girlhood—but I was also Tom, the husband of another woman—the father of many children—who could never be aught to her in the future save friend or brother.

He had tried to tire her out—to compel her to leave and return to her mother; but here again Rose's persistency stood her in good stead.

"I have done nothing wrong," she contended, "and I shall not go."

Then he went himself, and had the children conveyed away likewise.

"That was this morning," Rose explained, "and to-night I am here. I arrived in town about six o'clock, and went to an hotel and got a directory, and found out where your chambers were. I did not want to go to your house if I could avoid doing so."

What a goose she was! I, with my evil knowledge of the world—learned in a school where the world always turns its worst side out—stood aghast at her lack of the most ordinary prudence.

Knowing her husband to be jealous—knowing there were a thousand tongues ready to make a nine days' tattle about her, waiting only the signal for attack to tear her fair fame to pieces, she left the secure shelter of her home, travelled to London without even a maid, drove to a grand West End

hotel, and came out at the latest time in the evening she could well select—to see me, it was true—but, so far as society was concerned, or knew, to see anybody.

Thinking all this over, I said—

"You must go back by the first train to-morrow morning."

"No," she replied, "I will never enter Walter Surry's house again."

"Folly!" I exclaimed, and then she burst out crying.

"He had taken everything from her she cared to have—all she wanted now was peace and her children."

"Then," I remarked, "you must come to my house; if I am to interfere in this matter at all, you must follow my advice; and I will have nothing to do with the business if you persist in staying alone at a London hotel, at the mercy of Dick, Tom, and Harry's good-natured inferences. In fact, you ought not to have come to London at all. A letter would have brought me down by the first train."

"Would it?" she answered, faintly—"I was afraid it might not."

Might not—ah! Rose.

She still sat leaning back in her chair, with the fire-light playing over her face, and I could not help remarking how wan and changed she looked—how changed from the Rose Surry I had seen driving in the park!

"Are you quite well?" I asked at length, meeting

her questioning glance. "I mean, do you feel strong, and in quite good health, excepting the fatigue consequent on your journey?"

"Yes, quite," she answered; and then added, hurriedly—"Oh! you will get me back my children, or I shall die!"

"And you will return to Grayborough."

"No, the solitariness would drive me mad."

"Will you come home with me?"

"Yes, anywhere not to be alone."

"We had better go at once, then," I remarked, "and I will think over the best plan to pursue between this and to-morrow morning."

She rose at my words like a child, and saying simply, "Thank you, Tom—I leave it all in your hands now," moved towards the door. On her way, however, she stopped, and, turning to me, remarked nervously—

"But your wife,—will she not object?"

"It is that you may have the protection of my wife I propose your coming to our house: only pray do not mention you have had any quarrel with your husband: you can say you have come to town on business, and I thought it must be uncomfortable for you to stop at your great town establishment alone."

She opened her eyes in astonishment at my advising her to even insinuate a falsehood, but said she would do whatever I told her, though she did not much like it.

And you were right, my dear, and I wrong, for the

truth—no matter how inexpedient it may seem at first—is always best in the long run. I might have learned this in the course of my practice, but I had not, and behold the use I made of my worldly knowledge conned since the days when we walked together by stream, o'er lea, through copse, was to teach my darling in her extremity to be false—false with intention, spite of her cowardice, I verily believe, for the first time in all her life.

When we went out into Pump Court, the rain was pouring in torrents, and she clung to me whilst trying to shelter her with my umbrella. We walked together over the dripping pavement I had paced so many a hundred times alone, beneath the porch of the Temple Church, and so into Fleet Street. Then I left her in the shelter of a doorway for a minute, whilst I secured a cab.

My darling, I have often wondered since what you thought of during those few seconds when you stood all alone in an unfamiliar London street—all alone in the world, indeed, except for me!

As we drove to my home, I called at the hotel where she had left her luggage, and desired the waiter to inform Sir Walter Surry when he arrived in town, that Lady Surry had gone to stay with her friends at the address I gave him.

The man knew me by reputation. I had risen high enough in my profession for that, and I felt thankful at having put the affair right so far. How Mrs. Luttrell might take Lady Surry's introduction to our domestic hearth at such a time of night, was

quite another question, but one which had to be faced. My own opinion was, she would put Lady Surry's rank on the credit side of her mind, against the natural prejudice existing on the debit.

She had known of my attachment to Rose. She was well aware I had loved the young lady very dearly, and it is never a pleasant thing for a woman to reflect she has caught a man's heart on the rebound—supposing she fancies she has caught it at all—for which reasons I did not think she would approve of Lady Surry's visit, but then on the other hand she *was* Lady Surry, and I heard in imagination my Catherine discoursing to future callers concerning her visitor; I could see her mentally planning a journey to Grayborough in expectation of the invitation which must surely come; and I could prophetically hear her telling me in the dead of night what a nice connection it would prove in future days for the children.

I thought of all this as we drove wearily along in the cab. Ah! days long past, it was not in such prosaic musings I occupied myself when a boy I carried my future love home in my arms to the Hall; or when a man I whispered my love to her in the spring twilight!

It all turned out as I expected: Mrs. Luttrell did not quite like the intrusion, yet was she gracious and hospitable; but I could see Rose did not take much to my wife. She shrank a little, it seemed to me, from the apparent warmth of Catherine's welcome, and she looked at me pitifully from time to time in

a way which I should have interpreted to mean, even had she not afterwards translated it into words during my wife's momentary absence from the room—

"Oh! Tom, if she knew how it all was, she would not wish me to be here."

"We must put it right then," I answered, cheerfully, and the poor little soul went to bed happier, I think.

CHAPTER VII.

ALL WRONG.

THE first hours of that night, which ought to have been devoted to slumber, were spent by Catherine in questioning and cross-questioning me concerning Lady Surry, and considering the practice I had gone through in that sort of thing—cross-questioning other people—I cannot say I came out of the ordeal well.

During the course of that conversation I told her a great many things which would have inevitably resulted in a prosecution for perjury had they been stated on oath. She wanted to know so much too much. She asked me how I knew Lady Surry was in London,—if she had sent for me,—how it happened that the servants were not at the town house, —above all, how it chanced Lady Surry had not brought her maid.

"Good gracious," I answered, "I never imagined you wanted the maid. Shall I send for her in the morning?"

"No! oh, no!" Catherine said, adding next moment, however, regretfully, "but the servants may wonder, you know."

"So they may, with all my heart," I replied; "still, if you want the maid, have her by all means. My notion is, however, she would only be making our people discontented."

"Indeed, that is very true," Mrs. Luttrell kindly agreed, and there ensued a silence, which was broken by my wife saying, a minute or so afterwards,—

"Do you not think we might manage to give a party whilst Lady Surry is with us?"

"Certainly; but had we not one a fortnight ago?"

"Yes,—only—"

"Oh, if you want to give another, I have no objection; however, I do not think it can be whilst Lady Surry is here, as I know she wishes to stay in town as short a time as possible."

"I did not think of that," murmured Catherine, and I fondly hoped she was going to sleep; but no, she commenced in a second or two again, fresher than ever, trying to pump what business this was on which Rose had come to London.

Now in a general way, this was a proceeding to which I should have put an immediate stop, for I never had spoken to my wife about my clients, and I did not allow her to speak concerning them to me, but on this occasion I proved a coward—I think men always are cowards when speaking to women about women—and put her off, or tried to do so, until she fairly compelled me to make up a

falsehood for her especial benefit, and tell her a long story about a relation of Sir Walter's who had been entrapped into a low match, and got into trouble, and that Rose had thought of me, and offered to come up to London to see what could be done.

The story was true enough in one respect, though not with respect to Rose. My own brother Stephen had got into just a similar scrape, and the narrative consequently flowed on easily and smoothly enough. Catherine believed it implicitly, all the more readily, perhaps, because I cautioned her on no account to mention the matter to Lady Surry.

"She is in great trouble, and does not look at all well," I finished; "and I should not like her to think I had spoken about her and Sir Walter's concerns to any one. While she is here I wish you would write a line to Joan, and ask her to spend a day. She and Lady Surry used to be great friends."

"And so were you and she," remarked Catherine. By the change in her tone I felt I had made a mistake in saying anything about Joan. "You were very much in love with her once, were you not?"

"I was," I answered, "when I was a boy—a long time ago—but that was before I ever saw you, Catherine."

I tried to say this tenderly, but I failed. The memory of my first love was very present with me at that moment—my first love, who, in those blessed, far-away days, had been to me like child, wife, sister, friend—all in one.

That night I dreamed a very strange dream. I was on the bank of that well-remembered river once more, Joan and Rose stood on the little promontory of gravel, with hands outstretched towards the bag, which floated rapidly away. I tried to arrest its progress, but, failing to do so, stepped from the stones into the water, and pursued it down the stream. Suddenly the water deepened, and at the same moment I saw it was Rose herself who was being carried away by the current.

Desperately I struck out in pursuit, for I was already out of my depth. Panting and gasping, I swam on, never able, however, to get near enough to catch her dress, which I still beheld gleaming white and limp on the bosom of the waters.

We were in a great river by this time, but there was not a boat on its surface, not a creature on its banks. I looked if there were no one I could shout to—no one who would give me help—and then, seeing there was none to save, I dashed forward with fresh energy.

Even now—after many, many years—I can recall every circumstance of that dream; I can feel the water licking my lips—the strain of my muscles as my arms clove the water; I can see the peaceful greenness of the bank growing more and more distant every moment; I can follow the light figure floating on more and more rapidly. I remember the mad, passionate despair that rent my very heart—the impotent agony of my soul. I make once again a final struggle, and through the waters seize

my darling's dress; then there comes a great darkness before my eyes, as there came in that vision —some one unseen before, interposes between us, tears Rose's gown from my grasp, and bears me with painful strength to the bank, where I recognise my wife!

It does me harm to write about all this. As my memory pourtrays once more that scene, I lay down my pen, and pace the room. Oh! Rose—my love! my life!

And yet what folly all this is. I recollect thinking just the same thing, thinking it was all senseless folly, when, after awaking, trembling and afraid, I lay through the hours of that weary night talking to my own soul.

The woman was nothing to me. She had elected to marry another husband, and quarrel with him. There was no Rose Surry for Tom Luttrell now, only Lady Surry—Sir Walter's wife—my client.

That this should be so, I resolved—resolved with all the strength of my mind—viz., whilst Lady Surry stayed with us, home should see less of me even than usual. There were certain things it was needful for me to do in her interest—certain letters to write, certain interviews to seek—above all, I had to find Sir Walter Surry; but there existed no necessity for me to remain long at home or to return there early, and consequently for two days Lady Surry and I never met.

Then she took the extremer step of coming again to my chambers; but this time with Joan—dear,

loving Joan, to whom she had told everything, and who proved in this time of need as staunch a friend as she had been true a daughter. It was on this occasion Rose explained how she came to marry Sir Walter, as if that mattered to me now or could make the present better, the future happier. Afterwards we talked about her position.

"I will let Joan know the moment there is news of any kind," I said; but, as they were leaving, I held Joan back, and added—"For mercy's sake, Joan, keep her from me. I cannot bear it. And I cannot make her understand."

"Dear Tom," Joan answered softly, and the tears were in her eyes as she spoke the words.

What did they find to talk about, my wife and Lady Surry? Doubtless of their children; and I used often to fancy Rose drawing mine to her, and fondling and petting them, both because she was a mother herself, and because she remembered—and then I was wont to grow hard and angry in a moment when this softening picture was turned and the canvas reversed—when I saw her in imagination looking for something in my children which they lacked—searching their mother's face for qualities she instinctively desired to find, but could not, and then turning for comfort to Joan—the tender, brave, impulsive self-reliant Joan of old.

When a man has made a mistake in the building of his life's house, he is never so disappointed with his own want of skill as with the house itself.

That was my case in those few short days, which

seemed to lengthen themselves out into years. Heaven pardon me!

But what else did those two women talk about? I have since ascertained that Catherine devoted some portion of that abundant leisure with which Providence had blessed her to cross-examining Rose, as she cross-examined me, but with much greater success.

Rose was but a poor dissembler, and ere long my Catherine knew she had never been to the great town house at all, and that she had come to my chambers on that winter's night, when I was supposed to have been ceremoniously invited to an interview—all of which incongruities Mrs. Luttrell kept sacredly and secretly within her own breast, as within a storehouse, wherefrom, when the evil days came, coals of fire were to be heaped on the head of an offending husband.

No human being would believe the trouble I had to ascertain Sir Walter Surry's whereabouts.

Subsequently I have reason to know this was attributed to me as a sin, Mrs. Luttrell arguing, with the usual logical accuracy of her sex, that if I had wanted to find him I could have done so; but this was not the case. For some time he had led so wandering a life, that not even his most intimate friends could indicate his whereabouts with certainty, and it was therefore necessary for me to track him down step by step, which at length I did.

Even then, however, I could not immediately start in pursuit, for I had been retained on an important

case, and even for Rose I could not throw up my brief and desert a cause I had made my own, and which I ultimately won.

Women say a man never truly loves them unless he be willing to do anything for their dear sakes—and I fancy the women are right. That individual who observed—

> "I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not honour more,"

never certainly had fallen over head and ears.

In the days when Rose was still *my* possible Rose, I should like to have seen the retainer that could have kept me from her side; but now, alas! Rose was not even possibly my Rose, and rent and taxes, tradespeople and Her Majesty's tax-collector, had to be satisfied as well as my client's interest served.

Heavens! what a life this would be if it could always be only apple-blossoms and Rose; but then, alas! both Rose and apple-blossoms are expensive—the one involves an establishment, and the other a gardener.

Why—oh! why did Adam and Eve leave Eden? Was it that Eve wanted to see the latest fashion-book, and that Adam disliked the trouble of gathering peas for dinner, and fruit for dessert?

If only there could be a second garden of Eden planted, say in the Thames Valley, or on the top of Richmond Hill, I think I might promise to refrain

from any dozen trees the owner of that freehold desired to keep intact.

There is an observation, however, I desire to add.

Should any one reading these lines be tempted to present me with the like, I should prefer Paradise, without any Eve who could now be brought to me.

Alas! that we should outlive our illusions. I think as little of women at this present moment as I daresay most women who understand the world think of men—that is to say, we may get on comfortably enough without the grand passions, the profound despair, the mad agony, the rapturous joy we once thought necessary to make up the whole romance of life.

For, behold, life is not a romance, but a reality—full of such stern sorrows, such bitter tragedies, as might make the ringlets of romance itself fall out of curl.

But all this time Rose and her affairs are waiting.

The moment I had finished my speech in the case to which allusion has already been made, without waiting even to hear the verdict, I left the court, repaired to my chambers, divested myself of wig and gown, put on a top-coat, directed my clerk to telegraph result of the trial to me, took a cab to Euston Square, and was soon on my way to Cromingford.

I ascertained Sir Walter had returned to Grayborough almost directly after his wife left, and knowing of how little use letters are in explaining

away, or smoothing down conjugal differences, it was my intention to seek a face to face interview, and beard the lion in his den.

Since the time when I went down to claim my bride, and found her married, I had never been in that part of the country at all, and as I strode along the remembered roads it seemed impossible to realise the free, happy life I once led, wandering by the mill stream, and parting the hedges to find out the blue-bonnet's nest.

It seemed to me still more strange to recollect that people like the Surrys had then appeared people almost too great and grand to approach—that the then Lady Surry, now a dowager, had been able to snub me very effectually, and that even their butler, sedate and white neck-clothed, inspired me with a very sufficient awe.

As for Grayborough, time was when I should have entered its gates with fear and trembling, and scarcely dared to ask for an interview with its owner, but now so assured and confident were my manners, that the old woman at the lodge dropped me a respectful curtsy, and the footman who graciously received my card was almost deferential in his reception.

In those remote regions it could not be that anyone knew aught concerning me, but I knew myself that I had made a certain mark in law and in letters, and this was sufficient both for myself and for other people.

How Sir Walter might take my visit was of

course quite another matter. If he refused to see me, I intended to return to mine inn, and send him thence an explanatory epistle; if he refused to read that, I resolved upon adopting another course. But the baronet saved me the trouble of resorting to either plan by walking, high and mighty, proud and conscious, stately and unbending, into the library where I sat.

I rose as he entered, and we bowed—we two stiffly bowed to each other—then he motioned me to resume my seat, and throwing himself into an easy chair, inquired,

"To what fortunate circumstances am I to attribute the honour of this visit, Mr. Luttrell?"

He laid such a stress on the last two words, that I knew in a moment that he had neither forgotten nor forgiven me.

"I come here on behalf of your wife, Sir Walter," I replied, calmly.

"I suspected as much," he said, and his face flushed, and his eyes sparkled. "I can hear nothing on, I can brook no interference in, the matter."

"Pardon me, Sir Walter, but you must," I retorted. "I am here as Lady Surry's next friend—not as her legal adviser—I am here as her father might be were he living, or as her brother, if she possessed one, to try to put a wrong right between you."

"It is impossible," he answered. "Nothing can ever be right between us again; she has left her

home of her own accord, and she shall never enter these doors more!"

"You are quite sure of that?" I said.

"As sure as that I am standing here," he replied.

He had risen in his excitement, and was standing beside the library table, with his clenched hand resting upon it.

"Pray do not agitate yourself—sit down," I suggested. It was a cool thing to say to a man in his own house, but he did as I bade him, and resumed his seat. "I have no wish to proceed to extreme measures at present," I went on. "I have come down from London to talk the matter over with you quietly man to man."

"I have told you already I will not discuss it," he said.

"And I have told you that I mean you to hear me. Of course," I went on, hurriedly, "I have only listened to one side of the story—that related by Lady Surry—but so far as I understood, there cannot be a question of her entire innocence."

"The question of her guilt or innocence is one which shall never be entered upon privately or publicly by me," he answered. "She has left her home, she has virtually ceased to be my wife, and she can never in the future be more to me than she is at this moment."

"You think it then fair to condemn a woman upon mere suspicion?"

"Suspicion, sir! have I not ample proof?"

"I think not," was my answer. "You have not a tittle of evidence which you could take before any judge or jury in the land."

"I never intend to take it before judge or jury," he exclaimed.

"Possibly not, but she may, and it is to avert so terrible a calamity that I am now here."

I said this very slowly and deliberately, and I could see it produced its impression. Sir Walter had looked at the matter hitherto entirely from one point of view—his own—the idea of Rose taking any action had evidently never occurred to him, and he sat thinking over my words, whilst I went on.

"You have condemned an innocent and helpless woman on mere suspicion, you separated her from her children without a shadow of real proof against her, you have done what you never dare have done had she owned a single male relative——"

"Stop!" exclaimed the baronet. "I cannot allow assertions such as these to pass uncontradicted. I had ample reason for the course I adopted. Even her own mother says I have not been unduly harsh."

"Sir Walter Surry," I replied, "before you ever beheld your wife's mother, I was well acquainted with her, and considering the extent of our mutual knowledge, you are not, I presume, going to take shelter behind her petticoats. She never cared for her daughter, she never gave her love or tenderness, and she sides with you now not only because you are the stronger power, but because she is, and has always been, jealous of her daughter, and desired to secure

for herself the man who has been the cause of all this unhappiness between yourself and your wife."

"Your authority for this?" he inquired.

"Nay, your authority rather for vile and wicked calumnies against your wife, who has never wronged you in thought or word or deed, but whom you drove from your home, to seek the advice of the only true friend she possessed in all the earth."

"It is perhaps as well to be accurate," retorted Sir Walter, with an angry sneer. "It does not appear to me that you have exactly described your position."

"I do not know what system of morals may obtain in your rank," I replied, hotly, for his tone was as insulting as his meaning was offensive, "but in mine, when a man marries it is thought only decent that if ever he have been the lover of another woman, he should try to forget the fact. My feeling towards Lady Surry now is as pure as it was when I carried her home a child to her father's house. What the loss of her was to me, neither you nor any other human being can even imagine—how it changed me and my life no one may ever know—but I did not come here to talk about myself. I have come to say you have committed a great wrong, which you must and shall set right."

He did not take this speech angrily, as might have been expected; he sat silent for a minute, and then, careful not to lose my advantage, I went on. I told him how I had seen the man the cause of all this

unhappiness riding years before with Rose, how she had left him to come and speak to me, how I had since questioned her about the events of that time, and elicited that he had then proposed and been rejected. I afterwards proceeded to relate how I had sought him in London, and entreated him to explain the reason which could possibly have emboldened him to address the letters to Lady Surry which excited her husband's ire. I prayed of him if he had preserved any of her notes to let me see them.

"I have every line in my pocket, Sir Walter, she ever wrote to him," I finished. "No human being could extract consciousness of guilt out of them. She was foolish and frightened, and even imprudent, I admit, but remember it was your own neglect which laid her open to his importunities. Even had Lady Surry gone off with him, there is no one who, knowing all the circumstances, could say otherwise than that the fault lay with you. Will you read those letters?"

"I will not," he said. "My mind is quite made up about the matter. You have probably meant well in coming here, but you might have saved yourself the trouble. My wife shall never return here."

"Is that your final answer?" I asked.

"It is my final answer," he repeated. "I will never live with a woman who has been even talked about. Had she ever cared for me, ever loved me, ever married me for anything but wealth and

position, this thing could not have happened. No man would have dared to insult her with his love."

"I will leave these letters with you," I said, more shaken by his words and manner than I should then have cared to acknowledge. "Whether you read or not, I trust to your honour to return them. I procured them with infinite difficulty, and it was not till I made Mr. Lovell Allen understand *I* intended Lady Surry should for the future be protected from him, and that she should be put right with the world, if not with you, that he gave way. I had another indirect hold over him, too, or perhaps he might not have proved so docile; but at all events there are her letters, and if you take my advice you will read them carefully."

"Keep them and your advice also, sir," he answered.

"You positively refuse then to do justice to Lady Surry?" I said, rising.

"I have done her full and sufficient justice," he replied.

"If that be your belief," I remarked, "it will then become my duty to counsel Lady Surry to seek the advice of some respectable solicitor, and to take whatever steps he may recommend for the purpose of re-establishing her position."

"You intend then to constitute yourself the champion of a married woman," he said with a sneer which proved my last threat had taken effect. "It is a thankless and a dangerous office. As you have

given me so much valuable advice, let me return the compliment by saying I should recommend you not to meddle in affairs that in no way concern you."

I turned to leave the room sick at heart—I had done my best, and my best had failed—I thought of the sweet, pitiful yearning face. I marvelled how I was ever to tell her, how merciless and stony he had proved. There did not seem another word of argument at my disposal, I could only say to him just what I felt, and I said it.

"God help any married woman whose husband turns against her—for she is more lonely than a widow. I marvel, Sir Walter, how you dared marry a mere child like that, meaning to take no better care of her than you have done. Hers has been a wretched lot—mother and husband alike cruel and neglectful. When I think of her as I first saw her, a lonely delicate little creature, in terror of a harsh mother, and when I think of her as I saw her in my chambers in London, a still more desolate woman, weeping over your cruel injustice, I feel a pity for her I could not speak, and an indignation against you I could not express."

And with that confession of faith, as there was nothing more to be gained by civility or diplomacy, I left the room, Sir Walter ceremoniously opening the door for me to pass out, and bowing haughtily in answer to my curt leave-taking.

The footman preceded me through the hall, and with a ceremony equal to that of his master, opened

the front door to afford me egress. I walked down the avenue, I passed through the entrance gates, where the lodge-keeper curtsied to me as before. I walked straight back to the inn, where I hastily swallowed some cold meat and bread whilst a gig was being got ready to take me to the station; then buttoning up my coat and taking my travelling rug, I drove off, the well-remembered landscape stretching away in the distance, sweet and peaceful as of old, with as sad a heart as I had carried in my breast for many and many a long day.

When I arrived at the station, the first person I saw was Sir Walter Surry, mounted on a magnificent black steed that stood pawing with its feet and champing at the bit, anxious apparently to be off again, though it was evident he had been ridden to the station at no gentle pace.

"One word with you, Mr. Luttrell, if you please," said Sir Walter, and as I jumped from the gig he alighted from his horse.

"You may as well leave me those letters you spoke of; you shall receive them back again quite safely."

I could have uttered a shout of joy at hearing this, for I knew he was relenting, but I was careful not to betray my feelings; so without a word I handed him the packet, raised my hat, and hurried on to the platform just in time to secure a comfortable seat with my back to the engine, a matter I am very particular about.

It is marvellous how careful we become of our bodies, when all the hope and love and freshness that made existence so bright to us has departed just like "Life's young dream."

CHAPTER VIII.

RECONCILED.

I TRAVELLED back to town a very happy man. I was not afraid now of meeting Rose, for though there was no positive good news to report, at least the tidings I could now bear were hopeful. It all, however, went to prove that a man's deliberate words very often avail very little, that it is generally the arrow shot at a venture which hits the mark, after a careful aim has failed. It was the chance sentence I had spoken in my pain and my anger which pierced Walter Surry's coat of mail, which penetrated his vanity and his pride, and made him remember that after all there might be another side to the question which it was his duty to look at. She was the mother of his children, the wife of his choice, and I felt satisfied that although he might not relent at once, he would relent in time, and taking Rose back, make her a more careful, tender, loving husband than had ever been the case before.

On my return to town, I intended also to have a serious conversation with Rose herself, to point out the mistakes she had made, to induce her to strive in the future better to comprehend her husband's nature. I doubted the chances of my success, but I thought if she would listen to advice from anyone she would from me, and strive to follow it; at all events, I meant to try. So I spent most part of the journey considering what I wanted to say and how I had best say it—most of all how I could induce her to write such a letter to Sir Walter as might touch his heart and induce him to believe she was not so entirely indifferent to her husband as she was devoted to her children.

By the time I reached Euston Square it was late, and the streets as I drove through them to my chambers looked cheerless and sloppy. A drizzling rain was falling; the few people who were abroad hurried along with umbrellas up, the air was misty and heavy and dull, and a depression for which I could in no way account, seeing that busy men are not usually much affected by external influences, took possession of me.

I tried to cheer myself by thinking of the comparatively good news I should be able to communicate. I pictured the sweet smile that would thank me, the grateful eyes lifted for a moment to mine, and then I understood what was the matter with me, that the jade Memory was at her tricks again, and that it behoved me to be very very careful of my own soul, lest for one moment I should forget

Rose was Lady Surry, and I Catherine Luttrell's husband.

Oh! my dear, I loved you first and I loved you last with a passion no one but myself can even imagine, but I thank God now to remember that through all that time, which was a time of struggle and anguish to me, when you trusted your future, your fair fame, and yourself in my care, I never held your hand, or looked in your changed face with a thought I should have minded the angels recording in the Eternal Books.

It would soon be over, however, I hoped—the ordeal; the weary self-restraint; the continual temptation to forget, to believe the time of our enforced separation a dream, and that we might still be more to one another than we had been in the happy years gone by.

Honestly I had served her, in all honour I had held aloof from her. She came to me as to her only friend, and as a friend I worked for her.

What if I could not quite forget? if I felt it needful to keep out of her way? ah! my reader, I was only flesh and blood, and I had loved this woman once with a love which I knew could never die.

When I got out of the cab the rain was still falling, so I bade the man wait for me, as I merely intended calling at my chambers to inquire what letters there might be lying there ere hurrying home.

Since Lady Surry came to me I had worked later

than ever in Pump Court, but I meant to reach home on this particular night before she retired to her room, so as to tell her the result of my journey.

Full of this design, I hurried into Pump Court, and so up some stone steps to the door of the house where were my chambers.

It was wide open, and, to my amazement, I saw Joan standing in the hall talking to the housekeeper.

"Oh, here is Mr. Luttrell!" exclaimed the latter, who stood facing the court, and consequently beheld my entrance.

"Tom, I am so *thankful* you have come back," Joan said, laying an emphasis on the thankful, which filled me with an indescribable alarm.

"What is it?" I asked—"my father——"

"No, there is no one dead," she said, answering my unfinished sentence and my unspoken thought. "Let us go upstairs for a moment, and I will tell you why I am here," and she led the way to my room, where a fire was burning, and the lamp already lighted.

Joan closed the door, and then came close beside me. There was a look in her face that made me tremble, though I could not have told what I dreaded.

"Before I say a word," she began, "you must promise not to be angry."

"Do not be foolish, Joan," I answered; "tell me in one word what is wrong."

"Promise me," she insisted.

"Well, I promise—go on."

"The fact is, Tom," she hesitated, and then proceeded—"somehow Catherine has ascertained it is not all right between Sir Walter and Rose. Some kind friend has been making her believe there is going to be a divorce, and all sorts of things—and——"

"Finish, Joan," I said.

"Not whilst you look like that," Joan retorted.

"Look like what?" I answered guiltily, and, making a desperate effort, I hid the demon that I *knew* was glaring out of my face.

"Well, you know it was natural," Joan resumed, "Catherine thought we had all been deceiving her, and she could not quite forget how fond you used to be of Rose—and some one must have been advising her badly, for——"

"If you do not finish, Joan, you will send me insane," I said. "What has Catherine said or done that should bring you here at this time of the night?"

"Oh! Tom, you must not be angry—but she said Rose and she could not stay in the same house any longer, and so Rose and I have left."

"And where is Rose?"

"She is waiting for me in a cab in Essex Street; it was too late to come down Middle Lane."

"Come along, Joan," I cried, turning towards the door, and my voice sounded to myself hoarse and changed as I spoke.

"What do you mean to do?" Joan asked.

"See whether Mrs. Luttrell will refuse to receive *any* person I choose to take to my house. Rose shall stay there, by——"

But Joan covered my mouth with her hand.

"Tom," she began, hanging on my arm, and hindering my progress from the room, "listen to me. If you take Rose back there you will kill her —do you understand me?—kill her! She is not strong enough to endure a scene; she is quite exhausted now with driving for so many hours. The best thing we can do is to take her to some hotel for the night, and get quiet lodgings to-morrow. We have been going about all the evening trying to get apartments, for I knew you did not want her to go to an hotel; but I could not find a suitable place where they would take us in on the instant. Oh! Tom, do not be angry, but think what is best for Rose; do not think of anybody but her; if you do, you will only be making bad worse. Where had we better take her? she is perfectly worn out. Your housekeeper told me about some lodgings in Norfolk Street, but she does not know whether they are vacant."

"Let us go back to Rose, and I will see what can be done," I answered, and Joan, wrapping her shawl closely about her, ran down the stairs and out into the drizzling rain.

I felt like one crazed as I followed her. To think of Rose being driven forth like this—driven forth with contumely—driven forth from *my* house by *my*

wife! I do not know what I said in my despair—I only remember Joan bidding me hush—I only remember staggering through the night, through the courts and passages of the Temple, like one drunk, and reaching the door of the cab, where *she* sat huddled up in one corner, crying like a child.

"Why did you not take her to Southgate?" I asked Joan, savagely.

"Because she would not go," Joan answered, and Rose moaned out that she could not take herself and her troubles into any person's house again.

I went and secured the lodgings mentioned by my housekeeper, and then brought Rose and Joan to them. When I assisted the former to alight, however, she fainted away in my arms, and I carried her up to the dreary sitting-room, where the maid-of-all-work was striving to kindle a fire.

I never beheld anything in all my life which impressed me with such a sense of utter desolation and misery as that scene—the cold, cheerless room, the untidy servant, the dim light provided by a couple of composite candles, the dark bed-chamber revealed through folding-doors that stood partly open, Joan and the landlady trying to bring Rose—what the latter called "to." Oh! merciful Providence! will the events of that night ever fade from my recollection? shall I ever forget the devil which stirred within me at the sight?

"Tom," Joan said at last, "you had better go for a doctor."

And I went.

By the time I returned—it was a long time, for not a medical man I called upon was at home—they had undressed Rose, and got her into bed; and whilst I sat in the front room, the doctor went in to see her, and I waited in an agony of terror till he should return and give me his report.

"I do not think you need be uneasy, sir," he said, when he had creaked slowly and solemnly back to where I stood. "Your good lady is very delicate—very."

How I hated the man, even whilst I mentally blessed him.

"The lady is not my wife, doctor," I interrupted; "but I have known her since she was a child, and my sister will remain with her here till she is strong enough to be removed."

I said all this quite steadily, for I was determined there should be no misconception on the part of anybody as to the relation in which we stood.

"But she is married?" the doctor questioned.

"Yes—her husband is not in London though at present. Should you, however, consider her case at all serious, I will telegraph for him."

"There is no immediate danger," he answered, thoughtfully; "she is certainly very delicate, but still, with care and nourishment—I can tell better in the morning," he hurried on—"I will write a prescription now, if you favour me with pen and ink. Pray what is the name of my patient?"

For one second I hesitated, then said, distinctly—

"Lady Surry."

"I beg your pardon," he remarked, politely

"Lady Surry," I repeated still more distinctly; then, perceiving he could not quite understand me, I added—"Wife to Sir Walter Surry, of Grayborough."

He did not make a remark after this, he only wrote out his prescription, pocketed his fee, and departed. Clearly a discreet man, who, though he comprehended there was a mystery, did not think it his duty to inquire further into it.

After he was gone, Joan came to me. Rose was, she said, better. I need not be unhappy. Had I any news?

"Yes," I answered; "I had seen Sir Walter, and thought he would ultimately relent."

"That will be a tonic for her in itself," Joan exclaimed; "and now, dear Tom, I want to say one single word to you before you go home."

"I am not going home to-night," I answered. "I will get this prescription made up, leave it here, and then return to Pump Court. I shall be round early in the morning to know how Rose has rested."

"But, Tom, what does this mean?"

"That I am going to stay for the night in Pump Court—and that reminds me the cab which brought me from the station has been waiting for a couple of hours in Fleet Street. I must go and dismiss it."

"Tom" she put a hand on each shoulder, and looked steadily into my face.

"Yes, Joan."

"You are not going to quarrel with your wife?"

"You should never interfere between man and wife, Joan; what I choose to do, or leave undone, that I shall do, or not do, you may depend upon it."

"On the whole it is perhaps as well you should not return home to-night."

"I am surely the best judge of that."

"Ah! Tom, for the sake of dear old times do not talk in that cold, short, cynical way. It will not make things a bit better, and it makes you—oh! ever so much worse."

And then she fell to crying, and I kissed and bade her hold her peace.

Next morning the report was that Rose had rested tolerably; but the doctor said she had caught cold, and must be kept very quiet; and so she went on for some days, sometimes staying in her bed, sometimes lying on the sofa, but always remaining very delicate and weakly, and still there came no letter from Sir Walter Surry, although she at my earnest entreaty had written to him.

At the end of that time Joan sent for further advice, which came in a natty brougham, and assumed the shape of a portly gentleman, who carried an immense watch, and treated Doctor Snelling with exaggerated respect, insisting on his going first, and listening to all he had to say with an air of intensest interest.

When they had consulted together, and seen the patient once more, and the great man had written

out his prescription and pocketed *his* fee, I waylaid him on the way to his brougham, and asked his real opinion of Rose.

"For if there be any actual danger," I suggested, "I must telegraph for her husband."

The portly gentleman stood still on the pavement, and looked at me from head to foot, as though there were something singular about my humanity which it would please him to anatomize; then he said—

"*If* there be any actual danger—my dear sir, the lady's life is not worth a month's purchase. She is dying at this moment as fast as she knows how. God bless the man—why what are you to her?"

I do not remember much about that day. I telegraphed to Sir Walter Surry—I went into Court; but I cannot recollect what I said; it was all right, though, I suppose, as no complaint of carelessness ever reached my ears. I went back to my chambers after Court, and found Sir Walter Surry there before me.

When he asked about her, I inquired what it signified to him. He had been doubtful, I felt, as to whether the whole thing were not a *ruse;* but when he beheld me standing looking at the fire—which I could not see clearly—he understood there was no deception—that *my* Rose—mine through all—was gliding swiftly away.

"What is the matter, what was the cause of it?" he asked at length.

"Do not ask me," I said, "my heart is broken." And I verily believe it did break when that portly

gentleman told me in the sullen gloom of a winter's morning that she was dying as fast as she knew how.

For I could not disguise from myself the fact that my wife had killed her—that the fragile plant, which might have been tended and fostered back to health, was unable to bear the exposure and fatigue of that weary winter's evening. I ought never to have taken her to my home—never told Catherine falsehoods about her—never put it in the power of a cold, merciless woman to speak to Rose as I knew she had been spoken to—never left her to be thrust out from warmth and shelter into the drizzling rain and the gathering night, as though she had been the vilest of her sex.

Heaven forgive me!—I hated my wife then, and I made a vow that the same roof should never cover the twain of us again for any longer period than it would require to make the final arrangements I intended.

After a short time we—Sir Walter and I—went round into Norfolk Street, where Rose, wrapped in shawls, was lying on a sofa drawn close up to the fire.

He did not wish her to be told of his arrival, or prepared for his appearance, so we walked straight up together into the drawing-room, where the servant said we should find her.

He never asked if she were better or worse, and the only sign of anxiety I could trace in his manner was an involuntary pause ere he turned the handle

of the door. For a moment he seemed half-afraid of entering, then, collecting his courage, he crossed the threshold.

As he did so, Rose languidly raised her head, then almost shrieking out "Walter," stretched her arms towards him.

That was enough; the past with its fear and its suspicion fled away on the instant, and they were once more all they had ever been to one another, that, and perhaps a little more; he was kneeling by her side in an instant, kissing her, and sobbing out—

"Oh! Rose, my poor darling!"

Then Joan and I retreated from the apartment, and left the husband and wife alone together.

CONCLUSION.

IT was the most natural thing in the world that Sir Walter should desire Lady Surry's immediate removal to his own home; and it pleased me to see that, whereas a week previously he had declared she should never return to his home, he was now almost mad with anxiety to get her there —not indeed to Grayborough, for that was impossible—but back to his town house.

At first I urged him not to attempt taking her away until the morning, but Joan advanced so many reasons why it would be better for the removal to occur in the evening than at noon, that we at length despatched a messenger to the housekeeper, bidding her have all things in readiness, whilst I went out and hired the most comfortable brougham I could find to convey her to her husband's house.

When everything was ready, Joan enveloped Rose in wraps, and I stood aside for Sir Walter to carry her downstairs; but, to my astonishment, he drew back.

"Luttrell," he said, laying his hand on my arm, "I seem to have no strength left, I cannot do it. Will you?"

I did not answer. I only took up the light burden, and bore it to the carriage, where my sister placed pillows under her head, and placed her feet on the opposite seat, and folded the shawls and rugs over her tenderly.

After this Joan and I stepped aside, feeling our part was done,—that we had given up Rose to the only person who possessed a rightful claim to her; but Sir Walter, turning to me and my sister, said—

"You will come with us—oh! Miss Luttrell, do not leave her yet!"

"If you wish it," I answered, "we will come, but not with you."

So Joan and I walked up together into the Strand, where I hailed a cab, and bade the man drive as fast as he could to Sir Walter Surry's house.

We arrived there some minutes before the brougham, and Joan, telling the housekeeper who she was, went up to see that Lady Surry's room had been prepared for her, whilst I remained in the dining-room waiting their arrival.

There had been a time when I never thought to stand in Walter Surry's house with his or my own goodwill, but with the shadow of death stealing on towards that stately mansion it was no time to revive old feuds, to cherish mortal hatred. He had

taken her from me, but there was one mightier than man coming to take her from him, and my soul was so full of pity for the grief and remorse I beheld written on his face that it could not remember my own desolate life, or the heart which his theft had left empty for ever.

When the carriage arrived, without asking him whether I should or should not, I lifted Rose out as gently and tenderly as I could, and merely asking him to show me the way, carried her up the wide staircase and along a corridor, where my feet sank noiseless into the thick soft carpet, to her room.

She had fainted again, and I laid her down upon a couch, whilst the doctor, who had been already summoned, bustled up to her side and commenced applying restoratives. My part was done, the need for me existed no longer, so I walked to the doorway, and then paused and looked back. They had thrown aside the light shawl which enveloped her head, and her long hair rippled over her shoulders and fell in waves of silken softness almost to the ground. Her face was white as that of a corpse, and the blue-veined eyelids were closed upon the sweet pleading eyes. One thin hand drooped over the side of the couch. There was death in every line of her face, in the very outline of her figure, and unable to help myself I strode back to where she lay, and taking her hand, pressed it to my lips and heart, while she remained unconscious of me or my madness.

Then I left the room and her—it was the last time, living or dead, I ever beheld the face of Rose Surry.

Down the staircase Sir Walter followed me. Pausing at the dining-room door I asked him to favour me with a moment's private conversation, and when he entered the apartment I said,

"Do you wish my sister to remain here, or can she return with me now?"

"If she could remain," he answered, "oh, if only she could remain!"

"She shall do so if you desire it," I replied; "but if she stay I must stay until the arrival of Lady Surry's mother."

"Her mother may see Rose if she wish," answered Sir Walter, "but she shall never remain here."

"Then it will be impossible for my sister to do so," I said. "We are not low enough in rank for her to remain here exactly a a servant, and we are not high enough to stand above the world's opinion."

"Luttrell, do not be hard upon me," he answered, and I then knew I had been a little bitter in my humility; "do not leave me alone in my trouble, there is no man living I should so earnestly desire to call friend as yourself, and as for Rose, I know there is no woman she would so much desire to have with her as your sister."

"In that case," I said, "I will, with your permission, send for my mother, and she can remain here till ——"

There was no need for me to finish that sentence; we both knew there could but be one possible ending to it.

Over this part of my story I will linger no longer.

Next day my mother arrived, and I went back to my chambers and my work.

With regard to Catherine, I had not yet seen her. I did not mean to see her till all was over, and though Mr. Sherlock came and Mrs. Sherlock wrote, persuading me to go home, I gave both but one stereotyped answer, "Not yet."

I could not forgive her; I meant never to forgive her. I did not tell Mr. Sherlock Rose was dying, and reconciled to her husband—that her children had been given back to her to hold till death claimed her. I only remained obstinately firm. "Not yet," I said, and Mr. Sherlock went away marvelling exceedingly.

Before that month expired she was dead. One morning Sir Walter entered my chambers, and I knew by his face what had happened.

"Should you like to see her?" he asked. During her illness he had often asked me the same question, and I had always answered him "No." I answered him "No" now.

"You will come to the funeral, though," he said; but I shook my head.

"Is there never to be peace between us?" he asked.

"I trust there will never be war," I answered, and there never has been.

That night I went into my own house, and found Catherine dressed out for a party. She received me as a criminal, heaping reproaches on my head, exhausting her feminine vocabulary for phrases suitable to describe the enormity of my crimes. I had brought the good-for-nothing woman there simply to have opportunity of making love to her; I had laid out a deliberate scheme of wickedness and villany.

"Your sister, whom I always disliked and distrusted," continued Catherine, "aided and abetted your deception. I suppose you thought because she was Lady Surry I should bear it. Lady indeed! Had I my will I know what I should do with her and such as her; and as for you, sir, I wonder at your daring to return home in this manner to me, after the weeks in which you have no doubt been living with that wretch."

"Have you quite finished your instructive discourse?" I inquired when at length she paused, literally because, I think, she had not another word to say, "for if you have there is one question I should like to ask you."

"What is it?"

"You hated Lady Surry very much, you were very jealous of her, were you not?"

"And with reason," she retorted, "with good and sufficient reason."

"You will be glad, then, to know that she is dead,—that she died at half-past eight this morning,—that her husband, who is almost distracted,

brought me this news,—and that I have come here to-night merely to say your senseless jealousy, your pitiless cruelty, killed her."

With that I rose to leave the room, but Catherine rushed after me. "It is not true; it cannot be true," she almost shrieked. "She was delicate, but not ——— "

"She is dead," I repeated, "and I will never forgive you—never; I renounce you this night. From this hour I have no wife and you no husband."

She caught my arm, but I shook her off; she seized my coat, but I pulled it out of her grasp. It was hard for her, I see it all now, but I had not a thought then save for Rose thrust out from my house with bitter words and bitterer innuendos. I had not even a corner in my heart for the wife who, fancying herself wronged, had cast forth the intruder, reckless—as all such women are—of consequences, forgetful of mercy, oblivious to justice.

After that there comes a time in my life, the memory of which I should like to blot out—a time when I lived utterly alone, working hard it is true, and maintaining my wife and family, but leading a godless, hopeless, desperate sort of existence, uncheered by a single ray of light.

I made money for the only time in my recollection faster than I wanted it—I had to send away briefs—I had to turn a deaf ear to the solicitations of publishers. Fame came to me also; I climbed high in my profession; I wrote works which were eagerly sought after—outsiders, I doubt not, envied

me my success, ay, and perhaps grudged it too, but they need not have done so. If the fruit were fair, there was rottenness at the core; go where I would, do what I might, I could never get that night out of my mind when I found the poor child sitting in a common street cab, sobbing because she had been so evilly treated by the woman it was my misfortune to call wife.

I took the matter to heart as I have never taken anything since, as I never shall anything again. I brooded over it—I mourned about it—I had such an impotent yearning agony in my soul at times, that it seemed to me I could not live, remembering why Rose had died. And then I used to think "Oh! if I had only gone to see her again even in her coffin," but I could not have done it. After that hour, when I saw her lying senseless in her husband's house, I do not think wild horses could have drawn me up those stairs to look at his wife once more.

To this day, however, I could not describe the precise sort of feeling I entertained for Rose during that last part of our acquaintanceship. It was one I should certainly have been neither afraid nor ashamed to analyze for the benefit of any one, had analysis been possible, and yet it darkened my life more certainly than even the tender passion of my boyhood.

In the twilight she seemed to come back to me with her soft gentle ways, her sweet loveliness, her tender grace of manner, tone, and movement, and I

felt at times as if I should certainly go mad, when I remembered that she walked the earth no more, that let time bring what it would, it could never bear back upon its cruel waves that which it had taken from me—the child—the girl—the woman Rose.

But this is folly, and I must finish. At what precise period a doubt as to the justice and rectitude of my own conduct entered my mind, I cannot exactly tell, but I think it was one evening as I walked slowly through the Temple, thinking about Walter Surry's harshness, and Walter Surry's remorse, that it occurred to me, whether the course I had adopted was the right one, or whether I had in my way not erred almost as much as my wife herself in hers.

I had married the woman—I had vowed to love, protect, cherish her, and behold for the sake of another, who could never even had she lived been aught to me, I cast her off, her and the children, which were mine also.

I did not in the least believe what Joan said, namely that it was Catherine's love for me which made her pitiless towards Rose, but slowly by sure and almost imperceptible degrees I came to see that, no matter what my wife might have been or might have done, I had not been right, and so after a long time I went back at last and told her if she were willing to forgive and to forget I was willing to do likewise.

"I did not make sufficient allowance for you," I

finished, and Catherine never contradicted me. She had talked the matter over with her female friends till the memory of Rose ailing and weakly driven out to die, faded away, and no image remained on the canvas of recollection save the fact that I had been a great deal too fond of another woman, and left my home and family because she died.

But for all that, Catherine was very glad indeed to welcome me back, to condone my misdeeds, and to forget her own. We celebrated our reconciliation I remember with a dinner party, and Catherine wore a violet-coloured velvet dress, with which I presented her, and looked very handsome indeed, for the colour became her admirably.

After that we had a series of entertainments, and the world at length thoroughly understanding I had seen the folly of my ways and the wickedness of my devices, felt satisfied and received me back into its bosom.

And so the old existence was resumed as though nothing had ever occurred to break its monotony, and but for the visits which Sir Walter Surry frequently paid to the cottage at Southgate I might sometimes have been tempted to fancy the whole episode a dream—a fantastic vision of my otherwise prosaic life.

Meeting, however, that tall handsome man every time I went to see my parents, I could not think the past a dream or the present quite satisfactory.

"He is coming after you, Joan, I suppose," was my somewhat irritable remark one afternoon when

he and I had crossed each other's path once again, and though Joan said "Nonsense, Tom," I knew quite well it was so, and that some day I should lose my sister and see her married to the man for whose sake she had refused many an eligible offer.

He should have married her at first. Joan was really the wife Sir Walter Surry wanted, and I know now he is far happier with her than he ever was with the ewe lamb he took from me, merely because, as it sometimes seems to my imagination, I was so poor that I had only one thing in all the earth which appeared valuable in my eyes.

It came to marrying of course ultimately. He proposed, and Joan accepted, and when the wedding took place I attended it in lieu of my father, then growing old and infirm, and gave the bride away.

But we have never visited—never been intimate in our acquaintanceship—Joan is now, as I have said, a very great lady, and her way and mine do not lie together. She says this divergence is my fault and of my seeking, but I do not quite agree with this.

I think my path began to diverge from that of most people when my life was thrown out of gear the morning I saw Rose walk out of church Walter Surry's wife.

And this is all my story which I began to tell so long ago, and am only after months and months able to finish to-night. There is not much in it. For a moment I drop my pen and recall the few incidents it contains: a child standing by the water's edge, a girl listening to a love tale, apple blossoms

strewing the grass her dear feet press, two most happy wandering together side by side, two most wretched cast out of their paradise, two meeting once more after years of separation, two parting till Eternity. Here lies the miniature of my first love; there hangs the portrait of my last, and yet they are both the likenesses of one and the same person, for I never have had but one love in all my life, and I never shall have another till the skeleton rider comes to fetch me from brief and book.

THE END.

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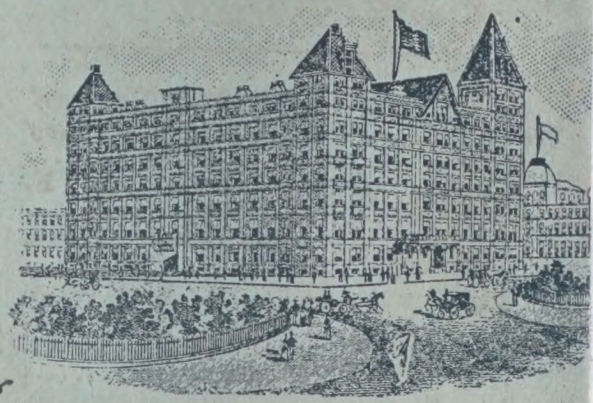

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